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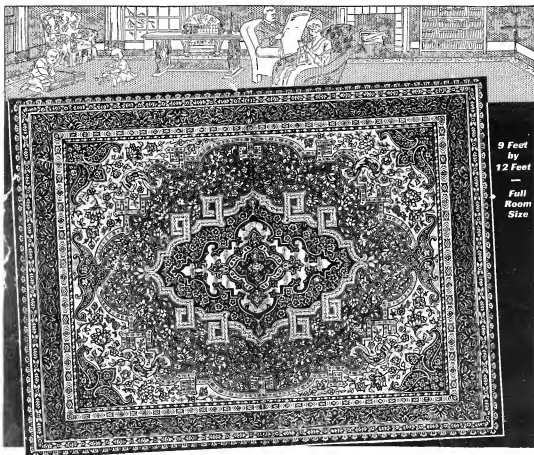
APRIL 1922

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE



Roy Norton, J. Frank Davis, Clarence Herbert New,
Jonathan Brooks, Bertram Atkey, George Allan England,
Samuel L. DeBra, George L. Knapp, David Gray and others

APRIL 1922 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 34 No.6



Brings This Seamless, Wool Face **BRUSSELS RUG**

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Dept. 4211 Chicago, Illinois

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It's a Shame for You Not to Earn \$10,000 a Year

-When Others Do It So Easily



He Does It

"Last week my earnings amounted to \$554.37; this week will go over \$400."
—F. Wynne, Portland, Oregon.



So Does He

"I had never earned more than \$67 a month. Last week I cleared \$300 and this week \$218."
—George W. Kearns, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



And He—

"The very first month I earned \$1,000. I was formerly a farmhand."
—Charles Beery, Winterset, Iowa.



And He—

"After spending ten years in the railway mail service at salaries ranging from \$900 to \$1,000 a year, I decided it was necessary for me to make a change. My earnings during the past thirty days were more than \$1,000."
—W. Hartle, Chicago, Ill.

WHEN a farmhand steps from \$50 to \$1,000 a month—when a fireman jumps from \$60 a month to a job paying him \$500 for two weeks' work—when a former railway mail clerk at a yearly salary of \$1,600 changes his job and earns \$1,000 in thirty days—and when hundreds of others quickly jump from small pay to magnificent earnings in the same way—then it's a shame for you not to earn your \$10,000 a year!

There is nothing exceptional about these men. They'd tell you that themselves. Many had been clerks, bookkeepers, mechanics. Some had been policemen, farmhands, firemen. And then in one swift stroke, they found themselves making more money than they had ever dreamed possible. The grind of routine work—the con-

stant struggle to obtain even a small increase—all this was left behind. Today they know the thrill of making big money; they are no longer ruled by an office clock. There is genuine enjoyment in every hour of the day, for their work is filled with real fascination. They have found not only the most interesting, but the best paying branch of all business.

A field that they had never dreamed of as theirs they found to be easy and uncrowded. Earnings that they had always hoped to reach and that their old jobs could never have paid, were right there in this new field waiting for them. Hundreds of others have found success the same way. You can too—let us tell you how.

How You Can Do It Too

What these men have done, hundreds of others have done, hundreds are doing today, hundreds will do tomorrow. And you can be one of them! For now the same opportunity that put these men into the big-money class is open to you!

In the first place they discovered a vital fact about business. They discovered that the big money is in the selling end of business. In the second place they discovered a new and amazingly easy way that will make any man of average intelligence and ambition a salesman, no matter what job he held before.

Salesmen are the very life blood of any concern—upon them depends the amount of profits made. The men who can put a product on the market and boost its sales are absolutely indispensable. No wonder that man for man salesmen receive the highest pay. For the men who are Masters of Salesmanship—there is practically no limit to their earnings. Some receive almost fabulous amounts. And that is how these men and hundreds of others like them found the way

to their present handsome incomes. They are all Master Salesmen now!

Yet previously they had no idea of becoming Salesmen. If you had told them success awaited them in the field of Selling, they would have laughed at you. They would have told you that it was absurd to think of it—for they had never sold a dime's worth of goods in their lives! Then they learned of a great organization of top-notch Salesmen and Sales Managers formed for the great opportunities in the field of Salesmanship and to help them to positions in the lines that most appeal to them. Step by step—in their spare time at home—this great organization, The National Salesmen's Training Association, took them through every phase of selling. Every underlying principle of salesmanship was made as simple as A B C. Then as soon as they were qualified and ready, the Free Employment Service of this Ass'n helped them secure good Selling positions. Almost before they realized it they were in the big-money class.

FREE BOOK

Starts You for Your \$10,000 a Year

start now for your \$10,000 Year. Mail coupon at once to The National Salesmen's Training Association. Dept. 76-D, Chicago, Ill.

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION,
Dept. 76-D, Chicago, Ill.

I simply want to see the facts. Send me FREE your Book on Salesmanship and Proof that I can become a Master Salesman. Also send list of lines with openings for Salesmen.

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Address.....

City.....State.....

THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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COVER DESIGN: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "Lanky Bob"

A Noteworthy Novelette

Lanky Bob By E. E. Harriman 162

This spirited story is of the West Western; you'll thoroughly enjoy its rapid movement, picturesque background and exciting episodes.

Thirteen Memorable Short Stories

To the Lights By Roy Norton 1

A vivid story of valiant men at sea, by the author of "The Vanishing Fleets," "Captains Three" and many other memorable stories.

Understanding By David Gray 12

The gifted author of "Gallops" and "Mr. Carteret and Others" is at his best here in a joyous chronicle of this dry day.

The Drivin' Fool By William F. Sturm 23

The thrilling story of an exciting cross-continent drive—by a man who has himself made records doing the same thing.

The Place of Hisses By Charles Alexander 39

In this new story of the Olympic Mountain wilderness Mr. Alexander describes a strange animal migration and its dramatic end.

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 45

"A Challenge to the Submarine" describes a daring exploit at sea, designed to solve a grave international problem.

The Daughter of Nez Coupé By Meigs O. Frost 56

The little known Louisiana swamp country provides an attractive background for this deeply interesting story.

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MAGAZINE

APRIL
1922

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

Leatherbee's Luck By George Allan England 73
The author of "Bennington's Boy" and "Bennington's Bandit" here tells a sprightly tale which you will find diverting indeed.

Bill Garford's Last Play By Culpeper Zandt 80
That much-traveled and blood-dyed jewel, the Glowing Ember, here at last comes back to its rightful owner.

The Admiral By Warren H. Miller 90
Wherein a boxing-match on the deck of a battleship leads to interesting results—by the author of "The Hoodoo Turret" and "Mine in the Kite."

Goats That Run By Jonathan Brooks 125
A romance of the race-track and the newspaper office, by the man who wrote "Cutting Back" and "Double Double Cross."

The Curse of Hui Pa'o By Lemuel L. De Bra 136
In this story you will meet a worthy companion to Mr. De Bra's "The House of Drooping Wreaths" and "A Thunderin' Thriller."

Spud's Probation By George L. Knapp 143
An exceptionally attractive story of boy life in the slums of a great city. Be sure to read it.

Easy Street Experts By Bertram Atkey 153
"Eagle-hawked" describes an adventure of a too clever pair of experts in the sly art of theft, which ends with a surprise for them.

A Serial People Are Discussing

The Hand of Esau By J. Frank I
A mystery novel of the highest quality, by the man who v
"Bill Titus" stories and "The Chinese Label."

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So another \$16,000 went into the flame

HE walked into the office of the Alexander Hamilton Institute late one day and enrolled for the Modern Business Course and Service.

"Too bad I didn't do this two years ago," he said, "it would have saved me \$16,000."

"It took me a long time to get that \$16,000 together," he continued, "almost five years of hard work and rigid economy. And it lasted just exactly six months after I set up in business for myself. You have a Lecture in your Modern Business Course—something about organizing a successful business."

"Yes," said the Institute man, "you have 'The Essentials of a Successful Business'."

"I replied, 'I picked up my friend's home the other day—a bitter thing to consider—if I had just that tiny fraction of service I would be'."

"God," he continued, "you can, why can't I?"

"A modern little able"

The flame that consumes the lives of men; that licks up businesses and devours the hopes of millions of homes.

All men contribute something to feed that flame; some men contribute everything; for the flame is Indecision.

always that next year would bring the opportunity that has never come."

"How can you hesitate?" she demanded; "you ought to have enrolled ten years ago."

* * * * *

IN an office a vigorous man of thirty-four filled in his enrolment blank and pushed it across the desk with a smile. Then rummaging around in the top drawer he produced a faded coupon and held it up.

"I clipped that from one of your advertisements in 1917 and never sent it in," he said to the Institute representative. "I have just one criticism of you folks. Why don't you say something in your advertising that would tell a man plainly what a fool he is to 'put it off.'"

The sad procession of wasted years

In that single paragraph he summed up the whole problem of the Alexander Hamilton Institute.

The facts about the Institute are known to hundreds of thousands of anxious men.

"Hiding, Toronto; Australian address, 42 Hunter St., Sydney

1932, Alexander Hamilton Institute

Many a man, seeing the progress these others have made, says: "Some day I will investigate that training for myself."

But he puts it off, and the days lengthen into months and the months into years.

Are you such a man? Are you one who is paying for his training without receiving its benefits? Paying in opportunities that pass you by because you have not the courage to reach out and make them your own? Paying in years of routine progress when the progress might be swift and sure? Paying in the most precious currency in the world—the hopes you have built for the future of your wife, and your children and home?

Will you, in justice to yourself and to them, spend one single evening with the facts? The facts have been condensed for busy men into a 120-page book

"Forging Ahead in Business"

It tells just what the Modern Business Course and Service is and does; just how it has been used by men whose position and problem were precisely like yours. Will you "put it off?" Or will you clip the coupon now?

Alexander Hamilton Institute
446 Astor Place, New York City

Send me "Forging Ahead in Business" which I may keep without obligation.



Name..... *Print here*

Business.....

Address.....

.....

Business.....

Position.....

April
1922

THE
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

Vol. XXXIV
No. 6



To the Lights

A story of gallant men and angry seas, by the author of "The Unknown Mr. Kent," "Captains Three" and many other notable stories.

By ROY NORTON

"**A**S chairman of one of the largest of the Billingsgate wholesale fish-dealing companies, I can assure your correspondent that the cause for the current high prices does not rest with the dealers. Your correspondent, who is evidently ignorant of basic facts, asserts that although it is the fishermen themselves who actually catch the fish, they—the fishermen—do not receive a commensurate share of the price which the people ultimately pay for a staple article of food. I must therefore correct him, and insist *that they do*.

"Contrary to your correspondent's mere surmise, I may say that the hardships of a trawlerman's life are enormously exaggerated. It must be borne in mind that

these men are brought up from childhood to regard their ships as their homes, that there they are most comfortable and in their element, that they are bountifully fed, that they are in a measure independent because all work without wage, but share on a well-adjusted proportion of the price which the fish command at auction (and I may add that our buyers on the spot are invariably and sometimes uncomfortably liberal in their bids), and that they do neither toil immoderately nor run any very serious risks.

"It stands to reason that these men when in fear of storms can always run to shelter, and that they do. There is no serious hardship or stress in the lives of the trawlermen. If your correspondent were to

suggest such a thing to a fisherman, he would be laughed at. No, they get much for little, and it is we men of business who, by the investment of capital and brains, fluctuations in price, etc., run all the risk."

(Extract from a letter in the *London Daily Market Scrutineer*.)

CAPTAIN JOSHUA FAIRLEY was pulling on the thick woolen stockings that would protect his ordinary socks and his trousers-legs from the harshness and oiliness of his great sea-boots. He sat on the edge of his bed in his cottage on Brixham hillside and stared out of the window thoughtfully at the sea whose surface was nearly two hundred feet below. He felt all of his seventy-five years, as if each had hammered him and battered him, and contemplated the hard truth that after a bitter venture that had failed, he was about to start life over again.

He pulled on his short "jack boots" absent-mindedly, and then disgusted with his own mistake, jerked them off, stood them in the corner and picked up and drew on the huge and hulking ones. He crossed one leg over the other and inspected a new half-sole and muttered: "Old Gamble be the best cobbler in Brixham yet! Still doing his work. And he bean't growlin' at it, or at Providence, or anything else. When I went to get the boot, he was whistlin' like one of them skylarks. So—I'll whistle too."

He puckered his lips beneath the white beard and mustache and tried, "Abide with Me," which to his mind was second only to "Rock of Ages," and reached for his faded blue jersey and pulled it over his head, still bravely trying to be melodious and cheerful.

"Father, be anything the matter with 'ee?" a voice hailed him as he cleared his head and tousled white hair from the clinging embrace of the knitted folds.

He appreciated, then, that for many months he had not attempted to whistle a melody, and that the mere fact that he had made such attempt was proof to other ears that he was endeavoring to put a cheerful face upon some trying predicament.

"Not a thing in the world, lass," he declared, turning to meet the troubled eyes of his widowed daughter.

"You're worried," she said, coming swiftly across to him and putting work-hardened hands on his broad, bent shoulders.

"Not too much," he said, still making gallant pretense. "Us has still got the *I'll Try*. Come here and look at her." He pulled her over to the window set into the deep cob-walls built more than a hundred years before, and with a gnarled finger pointed through the leaded panes at the outer harbor below. "There she be. Look at her. I was a fool, Nettie, an old fool! I tried to get rich by puttin' in they petrol motors, and hangin' screw astarn. I thought they newfangled boats were the thing; but—it cost so much to run 'em they didn't pay. So us has sold they engines, and had 'em hauled out, and—the *I'll Try* be just the same as she was when I built her, livin' by her sails and the winds of the Lord Almighty. Just as she was! No, not quite, because she's got a wheel instead of the big clumsy tiller, and—I was a fool. All I should have done to her was to put in a boiler and a steam winch to handle the trawl. That was a mistake. But—there her be, waitin' for us, all our own, and mebbe her'll be glad to have they dirty engines out of her again. Everything considerin'," he announced, almost triumphantly, "us be doin' right well. Us owns this house. Us owns the *I'll Try*. Us don't owe a farthing, and us has more than nine and twenty pound in the bank to—" his voice halted, lowered a trifle, and then finished—"to start over again. Us'll use the wind, hereafter, and make money so that when I have to quit the sea, our two nippers'll have a fine start. A proper good start!"

SHE fathomed his anxieties as well as his brave dissimulation, and shook her head sadly, and stared up at him affectionately.

"Listen, lass," he said, knowing that his pretense had failed. "After all, naught matters but the harbor lights. I don't mean they lights out there on Berry Head, and at the end of the breakwater, or the pier. I mean the lights that should shine for all of us when we come home from sea after all v'yages be done. Them's the lights that count. The ones that finally brings us home. So—nothin' else matters much to us, because us has done our best. Bean't it so? You'm been a good darter to me! And us has got all this, and I be good for ten years more, and—" Again he stopped, scratched his white head with his fingers, seemed distracted, and worried, and ended with: "And so what the hell's there to bother about? Tell me that!"

She was not shocked by his abrupt reversion to seaman's speech. The turbid exclamations of his everyday life had nothing in common with his sincere convictions. As she had once warned a meddlesome but well-intentioned and well-shocked visiting curate, there was an unrecognized line of division between Captain Joshua's faith, reverence and devoutness, and his use of words when in mental or physical action.

"His grandsons, my boys," she stoutly asserted, "says bad things sometimes. Their gran-f'ur may be careless in front of them sometimes; but he have put great arms over they two lads shoulders at night when they all knelt, and taught them proper respect for God Almighty. That be enough! Thou could'st do no more by they lads than he—Captain Joshua! I think it's better that 'ee go, now, and—please don't 'ee ever come back, lest the good Lord knows thou wastest time! Such men as Captain Joshua be a lot better, I do reckon, than be you."

That the well-meaning curate came no more did not perturb her. They say he never did.

CAPTAIN JOSHUA trudged down the steep and devious ways of the Overgang, with a bundle under his arm. To him the quaint roofs, the narrow street, the occasional stretches of gray stone wall were of no interest. He rolled past a wandering artist who, with easel and paints, was enraptured with a view, and under his breath grunted a derisive: "Humph! Loafin' lout! If I could get him aboard the *I'll Try* for a month, I'd make a useful man out of nothing. Playing with pretty things, he be. No use!"

He could not resist the temptation to stand in front of a ship-chandler's show-window and stare therein at a compact steam winch scarcely larger than a sewing machine, and the brass-bound boiler beside it.

"Wish to the Lord I'd a bought you instead of that blamed motor-engine," he thought. "The *I'll Try* be one of the last ships left that has to hoist trawls by hand-winch and—great dollops, it do be hard work!"

A long, troubled sigh slipped out before he could check it, and he had turned to hasten away lest the sin of envy creep through his mind, when the voice of the chandler stopped him.

"Morning, Captain Josh. See you look-

ing at that winch. I had expected you'd be in to buy that lot for the *I'll Try*. You should have it. It does more work than two men aboard. Wouldn't you like it?"

"I'd like it, all right, John," said the skipper, "but what with bad catches and bad markets, and that fool experiment with motors, I haven't the money, and—"

The ship-chandler laughed as if immensely amused.

"Since when has any man in Brixham town asked anything more than the word of Captain Josh? Why, you can have my shop on your word!"

"Nope," said the veteran. "I'll never buy anything more I can't pay for. I'm too old now to take any chance on debts. When my time comes, those up there on the hill—you know,"—and he jerked a heavy thumb over his shoulder in the direction of his home,—“they'll have no debts of mine to meet. Not one! Not a damned farthing!”

"I'll risk your living to be a hundred, unless, of course, the sea gets you," insisted the dealer; but the old mariner smiled and shook his head.

"Of course, John, it aint got me yet; but I dare say that some time it and me'll have a tussle when I'll come off second best. But I'll not have the steam winch till I can pay cash for it."

"All right! Go it, you stubborn old shell-back!" laughed the chandler; and then as Captain Josh continued his rolling, clumping way down the narrow street, smiled at his obstinacy, and discovering that his new assistant, who had but recently arrived from Bristol, was at his side said garrulously: "There he goes, white of head and clean of heart. Unbending! And I can remember, as a boy, when he was six feet two tall, and the broadest-shouldered man in all the port. Admiral of the fleet, for more than twenty years. As good a sailorman as ever cleared from Brixham. Fight as well as he can pray. One time, about twenty years ago, when he was nigh on to fifty-five, there was a free-for-all ruction down on the quay. He tried to be a peacemaker and quoted the Bible at 'em; but when that didn't work, he sailed in; and Lord, love me, boy! He gave 'em more fight than they'd ever seen in all their lives! He made 'em sick of fightin' in about three minutes. When he got through, they was layin' about like dog-fish, gaspin' and wrigglin' like mad. All the fight was gone out of 'em; but they

do say that the language he used while things was hot indicated that for the time being he'd forgotten all the scripture ever he knew. You're from Bristol, young fellow, but take a look at that old feller, so's you'll know him again, because, I tell you, you're lookin' at a man!"

And the new assistant, to please his employer, looked, and—smothered a derisive grin!

THE ships in the harbor rocked and swayed, lifted and fell in the rhythmic upheave and downfall of the swell that pushed in and out of Torbay. They seemed a part of that splendid beauty of gray or red cliffs that reared themselves about it, a part of the sea that in lazy mood merely rippled its shores, or in sou'easterly tempests tore in fury inward as if to rip the red and gray cliffs from their foundations and obliterate the encircling earth. But the red and gray cliffs invariably won.

The ships in the harbor, ketch-rigged, red-sailed, able to live in seas where huge liners perished, were eager to be liberated from their moorings. Their crews, clumsy, awkward, inept on land, but dexterous, apt and graceful on sea-washed decks, breathed deeply, freely, once they stepped aboard the dinghies that they must row from the placidity of the inner harbor out into the surge. The battered, ugly hands, torn perpetually by the gash of rope and trawl, tarred to blackness, thick-fingered, huge-knuckled, that ashore swung aimlessly and ungainly, seemed now to be endowed with power, decision and skill. The feet that, incased in the high leather boots, stumbled over the cobbles of the village streets, now deftly adapted themselves to the roll of the sea.

The land was not their element. It was foreign. It was sometimes distasteful. It was too hard. It did not yield and sway and give. It had no life in itself. It was a dead thing that never moved and never met their tread, and when it lay inert beneath them, they sustained a subconscious distrust of its solidity. To these men who throughout all their years had been habituated to the great, comforting roll of the sea, or the petulant unrest of it when like an angry child it had stormed as if at restraint, the land was stagnant, uncomfortable, unnatural, a sullen thing without soul or spirit of its own.

The dinghies rocked and rolled and tossed when they left the pier; but in each

one man sat and pulled at a heavy oar that was of feather's weight in his time-trained hands, while another stood, faced the bow and pushed, ever keeping an eye on destination. And ever he balanced as delicately and as surely as a circus-rider on the bare back of a horse, yielding, taking, but adroitly maintaining his mastery. The men in the boats passed comments that might sound strange to the ears of the land-accustomed. They shouted their comments. And always the interchanges were relative to the sea, for to them it was paramount.

As if each boat had mastered a puzzle of action, each came eventually to the side of a ship, and its men climbed aboard. Always, when they felt the familiar deck beneath their feet, they glanced around, their eyes sweeping over the homely objects in scrutiny of which most of their lives were passed—here the winch, there the end of the warp, here the trawl-beam with its iron heads, there the rigging that swept upward in a maze of tarred ropes and shrouds to stay the high and swaying masts. And always the final look was at the vane, that tiny thing at the peak of the mainmast, from forty to sixty feet overhead, where fluttered the gay emblem showing whether the wind was fair or foul. That was invariably the immediate solicitude, for it told the tale of toil—whether they must beat against head-winds, handling and hauling sail, straining muscles to gain way, or lounging in luxurious idleness and content when, with a fair breeze, the ship put out to sea.

CAPTAIN JOSHUA stood longest of all, thinking of the change. He sniffed the air, and thought he still detected the smell of gasoline.

"I can smell that damn'd stuff yet, Bill," he growled to his mate or "second hand," who was nearly as white-headed and sea-scarred as himself.

"It hangs on worse'n gin to an old woman's breath," growled that worthy, who was a vociferous teetotaler and never lost an opportunity for comparison. "They aint nothin' smells wuss'n that peetrul, unless it's one o' they polecats what lives around with farmers because they don't know no better. I tell 'ee, Skipper, the Lord gives us the wind, and it beant' natural for either men or ships to try to run on alcohol."

"Alkerhol? Hell! They bean't no al-

kerhol in that peetrol," insisted Bob Noon, the only member of the crew who ever imbibed, and was the constant source of solicitude for the mate, who strove persistently to reform him. "It looks like gin, and it smells strong, but it aint the same at all. I knows. I tried it."

"Course you would! You be an unregenerate soul! Oh, I know all about you," roared the mate. "Di'n't I hear tell how when you was at say in them windjammers what went Hawaiian-wise, you'm got drunk on cologne-water? And aint I told 'ee, scores an' scores o' times, that you'm a—"

"S'pose us stows the gab and gets to sea," Captain Joshua interrupted, as he had done hundreds of times before when argument threatened.

The *I'll Try* cast loose her mooring. Her big mains'l crawled up, traveler hoops a-creak, block and tackle singing a shrill song. She took on way and edged out into Torbay like a maiden pretending shy modesty. Her running bowsprit was loosened, slid outward, and from it sprouted more red sails. Her mizzen spread red canvas, and above it climbed another sheet. Her trim, sharp bow lifted and fell, carelessly ripping and imperiously dividing the rash waves. But the waves joined again, and were undismayed. They chuckled when they reunited at the stern, and fell together in the boiling wake. They conspired mischievously; for in that Channel, the greatest maritime artery on the whole globe, are perhaps the moodiest of waters. Fickle as the affections of a jungle-bred lioness, playful as a lioness can be and—dangerous and savage as the lioness when crossed. On that Channel a single hour of time may change the sea from the placidity of a lake to the ferocity of a tempest.

BUT two days had passed since the *I'll Try* sailed from Brixham in the sunshine, with the Channel all aglow with turquoise lights, and over waves that seemed playfully dancing with gladness and good will; but now she lay beaten and distracted under the shortest possible canvas, cringing as if from oft-repeated blows upon her oaken ribs. On her wet, slippery and heavily rolling and bounding deck, with tarpaulins and sou'westers dripping with driven rain and spray, every man of her crew, from skipper to cabin-boy, fought doggedly, desperately at the hand-winch. For seven hours they had labored thus,

unceasingly, until now they were too wearied and spent for speech. They laid breasts, hands or shoulders to the long bars, bent their backs, planted their feet, lowered their heads like bulls in a charge and tried again to make the weary treadmill round in the hope of hoisting the trawl. The great net, held open by a forty-foot beam and towed along the bottom of the sea floor upon "trawl-heads" that were like huge steel sled-runners, had caught what the men of the *I'll Try* surmised must be a sunken wreck. A trawl, one of the most expensive pieces of gear known to the craft, could not be abandoned until all hope was gone. Time and again had the thick warp been worked in and out, by sheer stubbornness of toil and strength; time and again as the ship swung off and lurched, the tired men hopefully thought they had felt the trawl, scores of fathoms down, yield; but time and again that hope had proved fallacious. And always, as they worked, they blinked the sweat from their eyes and lifted their anxious regard to the steadily increasing storm. A heavier blast smote the ship until she lay so far over that her lea bulwark met the water, and waves swept the length of her scuppers.

"'Vast heaving!" rumbled Captain Josh, holding an end of a long winch-bar in his hand, and the others fell heavily over the ones upon which they had been exerting themselves, to catch breath. "It's no use," panted the beaten old skipper. "Storm's got so high it's dangerous to hold on any longer. Us must bend a line on the warp, rig a buoy, cut loose, and hope to find our gear another day."

"Aye! And they be one chance in a million for that," growled Scruggs, the "ancient" of the ship, who having never married, having no kinfolk, living forever alone, was regarded by his fellows as a pitiable old pessimist.

"It do be the devil's own luck!" asserted the second hand.

"Aye! And if us had to—" The third member of the crew started a sentence that he was never to finish. The unexpected, unusual, rare accident was upon them. It came with the swiftness of a stroke of forked lightning. The winch-dogs, which worked against cogs, snapped with the vicious sharpness of a high explosive. The whole weight of the warp, the surging ship and the storm was instantly released. The long bars of the winch spun

like a huge, malevolent top. The *I'll Try* seemed to slip sidewise for a few fathoms and then again to lay over so far that she was in danger of going on her beam ends. She righted herself partially, jerking madly, as if in terror. For a moment there was no sound but the shrilling of the winds through her rigging and the hammering of the billows.

CAPTAIN JOSH, stunned, dazed, confused, lifted himself from the heap into which he had been thrown against the weather bulwarks, wondered why a red blanket blurred his vision, tried to wipe it away with his left hand and could not for a moment understand why that numbed arm would not respond. It hung limp and broken by his side. His right hand came up and swept away the blood that trickled warmly downward over his eyes and face. And then his senses returned, swift as light through clouds. Horror came with sight.

"My God! My God!" A whimpering voice caught his ears, and he saw the cabin-boy crawling up the slope of the deck toward the companionway, clutching with outspread fingers at the wet planks, while one leg dragged helplessly behind him. Down in the scuppers, with the waters submerging them as they swept the ship's length, lay two sodden shapes.

But the fighting spirit, the unquenchable bravery of the broken man by the weather bulwarks, tore upward to action. Instantly he caught the rail with his big, uninjured arm, lifted himself to his feet, and lurched and slithered downward to the nearest man, the mate of the *I'll Try*, who lay unconscious and half-drowned. He seized the inert form and dragged it back until he could rest it against a hatch from where it could not again roll downward into the wash and make death certain by drowning.

"Stand by, lad! Stand by! Hang on to something for a moment. Us has got to be men now!" he cried to the whimpering boy, and slipped and sprawled downward to seize the body of the ancient one, and laboriously drag it to safety.

"Bob! Get Bob!" screamed the boy. "He went over the port side! I saw him go! Thrown, he was—all in the air—thrown like a dead fish—by they winch-bars!"

Captain Josh lunged to the port side, clung to the rail and stared outward, releasing his hold only to brush away the trickle of blood that again troublesomely

obscured his vision. He could see nothing. He seized the nearest shrouds and dragged himself upward until he perched on the rail; where he stood swaying and peering; but even from that vantage of height he could discern nothing living—only the tearing uplift of the sea, the spume-thrown crests of waves, the murderous swing of the waters. No man could live in that for many minutes, be he sound and strong rather than broken and inert. To seek was useless. And—there was no time to pause if those aboard the *I'll Try*, and the ship herself, were to survive. The boy was still wailing and screaming. Captain Josh dropped heavily to the deck, and as he lunged past the boy, shouted: "No use, lad. Poor Bob's gone. God rest him! Steady now! Steady! Us must be steady if us would live." And hurriedly he sought an ax.

HE returned and with his uninjured and still powerful arm fell to hacking the warp whose drag threatened momentarily to end the *I'll Try*. The severed ends whipped like giant lashes into the air, and he narrowly escaped a second blow as the ship-end whistled through the air. The wind from its tarred and spraying strands lashed within an inch of his eyes as he instinctively jerked his head backward. The *I'll Try* leaped upward, leaned over, sprang free and seemed to fly outward like a tortured wild bird released from captivity. The water on her decks swept in a torrent across to the other side in great sheets. It carried with it loosened objects, and rope-ends that trailed as if eager to follow. The heavy ax with which Captain Josh had cut the imperiling warp was lifted, despite its weight, and vanished overboard in a smother of green. An iron handspike seemed to bound toward freedom, and brought up against the bulwark. The *I'll Try* lay far over now, and disregarding the wheel that swung idly to and fro, swept aimlessly before the storm. And even as she disregarded the wheel, Captain Josh disregarded her struggles. He jerked a sodden handkerchief from beneath his sodden jersey, tried to tie it about his bare head with one hand, realized that it was impossible, and hurried to the cabin boy.

"Lad," he said, more quietly and in a voice pitched barely high enough to surmount the tempest's roar, "ee have two hands. Help me to bind this up and belay

it to my head. I can't see with all they blood in my eye. Come, be brave, lad. Bind it fast and hard."

The boy forgot his pain under the influence of that steady old voice, and obeyed. His young fingers trembled at their task; struggled with a simple knot.

"Now," said Captain Josh, "us must work fast if us are to make port again. I know it's hard, for 'ee has a hurt foot, I take it; but if us can make port, it'll heal. Brace up, for if 'ee doan't, us'll never again see they harbor lights. All right now?"

"Aye, sir," the boy asserted with a bravery that his voice belied.

"Then get down the companion and do best 'ee can when I lower away they other two. Hang on with one hand to they steps at the bottom and try to ease they down. You see us cain't leave they on deck, lest they drown. Can do it?"

"Aye, sir, I can try," the boy asserted, striving valiantly to meet such brave example.

"Then down 'ee goes. Here, I'll give a hand," said Captain Josh, and did his best to assist the boy down the narrow opening and the steep steps. "Now stand by to help," he called as he disappeared from the boy's uplifted and encouraged eyes.

CAPTAIN JOSH seized the ancient by the folds of tarpaulin and jersey, thrusting heavy, horny fingers next to the unconscious skin, and dragged his burden across the deck. The toes of the worn sea-boots dragged listlessly. The inert hands dragged with equal helplessness. But this was no time for anything but action. Captain Josh almost pitched head-first into the companionway under the roll and swing of the sea as he lowered his burden downward. Under its weight the cabin-boy rocked and swung, standing upon one foot, imbued by the indomitable spirit above, and at least lessening the shock of the ancient's fall.

"Cans't drag him inside, lad? Good! A good lad! Then stand by for Bill. It'll be hard on 'ee, because Bill be heavier than the old 'un," he cautioned; and now with one hand, a bleeding head, but with an unconquered soul and resolute intent, he lowered through the narrow space the last stricken survivor of his crew.

The boy standing upon one foot was not equal to the burden. The weight fell heavily. It thumped upon the boards.

"What the hell do 'ee mean by—" began Captain Josh, inspired by habitual exercise of discipline; and then, remembering, changed it to: "Sorry, lad. Bill be mighty heavy for your arms. Doan't 'ee worry. You'm be doin' the best 'ee can. He aint hurt no worse than was by the fall. I be comin' down now."

He stood for a moment, inspecting with swift regard the skies, the waves, the aimless drift of the struggling ship, and then muttered, "She'll ride! She must! It's our only chance," and then painfully dropped below.

At the foot of the companion stairs he found one of his men. Through the doorway in the cabin he caught sight of the cabin-boy struggling on one foot and despite pain to get the other off the floor and up to the bench or the bunk. He crowded inward, and the task was accomplished. The other man was also brought in, lifted upward, and laid supine. Shutting his teeth against his own anguish, and probing with one hand, the skipper fumbled an examination.

"Bill," he said sagely, "has got, I think, some broken ribs. One side. Can't see what's wrong with the old 'un. But they both be sleepin' and so aint hurted, now. Cut the boot off 'ee, lad, and fall to. Heed what I tell 'ee, because 'ee must stay here by them—stay to the last, lad, no matter what may happen, for I be goin' on deck to bring the *I'll Try* home."

AND then, quickly, knowing that at any moment death might interrupt, Captain Josh gave all the instructions he could, and while he talked, fashioned for his broken arm a sling. He squatted down on the floor in front of the boy so that the lad's hands could tie the knots. Once he admonished him.

"Tighter, lad! Tighter! Make 'em fast so they can't slip loose."

He climbed laboriously up the companion steps, bent over and called reassuringly: "I be goin' to shut 'ee in, so if mayhap more rough weather comes, the wash wont drown 'ee out. So doan't be afraid. I'll be at the wheel and—we'll go home, lad, somehow."

But when alone he looked at the skies, at the sea and at the sails, and shook his head.

"Lord God of all the seas," he cried, lifting his head and reverently closing his fatigued and pain-stricken eyes, "for the

sake of all they below, help thy unworthy servant, who is so old, so broken, so tired, to take the *I'll Try* home. But if it be Thy will that we are to see no harbor lights again but those by Thy everlasting gates, pray let use see them shine clear to bring us to Thy port."

He rolled aft to the wheel that swayed helplessly to and fro, and using alternately his hand and knee against the spokes, brought the staggering ship up to her work. She seemed grateful for the attention, and eager to respond. Her mere rags of red sails filled, and she was ready to fight the storm.

"Good old girl! Good old girl!" Captain Josh muttered approvingly. "That's it! Take hold of the wind. Hang on to it!"

For an hour she half fought, half fled with that nearly motionless figure steering her, and yet the storm showed no signs of abatement. The dusk came early, filled with flying clouds, with wind-torn spray and the unceasing charge of great waves. Captain Josh shifted anxious eyes skyward, seeking some hope of a break. In all his sixty years at sea he had never been more troubled and perplexed.

"If only there'd come a lull at sunset," he muttered aloud after the long stillness, and was slightly startled by the sound of his own voice. He considered for a moment whether it was better to think aloud, for the companionship of that sound, or to keep his lips shut. For the time being he chose the former method and went on: "I can't make or douse sail with one hand, and I be so damned tired now that it hurts. It's mighty risky to let her fall off; but—us must have lights! I've just got to take the chance and let her come round. There's nothing else to be done."

HE crouched against the wheel, waiting to seize one of the momentary lulls when the gale paused to catch breath for another blast.

"Now!" he cried at last, as if addressing his full crew. "Around she goes!" and with hand and knee, he deftly worked the wheel until the canvas flapped and fluttered, and then under way of impetus and storm the *I'll Try* hesitated, paid off, leaned over so far that her lee rail was awash, was in danger of coming to beam ends if the storm sent a quick gust of wind, struggled, recovered, threw water from her deck, and fell away. She was not an instant too soon in setting her keel. for

the blast of wind came, as if angered by the skill of ship and man that had robbed it of its prey. It snapped the wet canvas. It shrilled through rigging. It screamed across the spume. Again she drifted as helplessly as a wreck, buffeted by wind and wave, lurching drunkenly, moving aimlessly, shuddering spasmodically, and with her wheel free.

Across her decks, slipping, sliding in his big and clumsy sea-boots, struggled her skipper, wondering meanwhile if she could possibly ride and survive, and hoping only to reach the lanterns that had fortunately, if carelessly, been stowed in a stationary fish-box. He reached them at last and was vastly concerned by the fear that they might have been so drenched that they would not light. He sat flat upon the wet and streaming deck in the tiny lee of the companionway, caught a lantern in his knees and after many attempts succeeded in lighting it. To hoist it with one hand was another trying task. He accomplished it, after a time, by first using his few and worn teeth, and when they failed, by clutching the rope between his knees. He spat a broken tooth out between his bleeding lips, and belayed the line to the mainmast.

"Bad and not proper it be, but—mayhap it'll keep some of they big smoke boats from ridin' us down," he remarked, hopefully, as he saw the swaying, tossing gleam aloft. "Now for the starn lights!" But despite his patient efforts, he could light none. He swore with inconsequent oaths when one slid from the grasp of his knees and rolled swiftly outward, bounding and bumping across the deck, found an opening and plunged overboard. He used more expletives when he discovered that another had a broken globe, and was useless. Night was advancing, black and chill, and he sat for a moment more, flat on the deck, and questioning whether he dared risk the great venture of going below to see how the stricken remnant of his crew fared. The wind defiantly answered him. The ship was straining too hard under the stress of storm.

"Nope. I can't do anything to help 'em, or myself," he growled. "I must get back to the wheel and bring her back to course again, before it's too black. If I could have but a cup of tay and a bit of biscuit! Damn it, why didn't I think to put some of they biscuit in my pocket before I came back on deck!"

He stumbled aft again, and again seized the idle and aimlessly revolving wheel. Again he watched like a cat, waiting to pounce, and seize the momentary advantage of a lull. Again he brought the ship back to a course. Whether it was a true one, he could not be certain. He was depending now upon his sense of direction alone. There was nothing to guide him, not even a solitary star shining through the murk. He made mental calculations, reasoning that in the beginning the *I'll Try* must have been so many miles sou'west off the reef-bordered Prawl Point, that the wind had come from due west, and that therefore it must be safe to run.

"If it weren't for they below," he soliloquized, "I'd lay her to. If I were alone, I'd not risk the carrying on, and—mayhap—could make it. But—they be badly hurt. So—I must get somewhere. If Prawl Point be sixty mile away, and—"

ENDLESSLY he debated the menacing dangers, and dared them. In the blackness of the night he fought against an almost unconquerable drowsiness; for by now he had been alert for more than forty hours. His broken arm throbbed with an ever poignant and increasing anguish, but even pain may be dulled by time and endurance, inasmuch as there is a climax where kindly nature brings either partial or complete unconsciousness. Sometimes in the long hours he felt himself swooning, and then he clung harder to the spokes and begged that God, in Whom he had such unlimited, unquenchable trust, might enable him to keep awake, that he might still sprawl across the wheel.

Dawn had come, and the sea was sobbing and spent; Captain Joshua was surrendering to the tiredness of long effort; endeavoring to recover kindness after tempestuous outburst, before he reached the ultimate end of endurance. He was no longer aware of change. He was still fighting, ruggedly and unrelinquishing to the last. His dimmed eyes could no longer see. The world rocked and swayed. That off on the horizon lay still; pale cliffs, meant nothing to him. All that he could concentrate upon was holding the battered ship up to the wind. That the wind was dying meant nothing. He thought it still a-rage. His uninjured hand seemed paralyzed. He could no longer hold a spoke and strove to steer with an elbow, and bony knees.

Mute but fighting to the end, Captain Joshua finally let go the wheel, made a last effort, crawled to reach the loose end of a halyard, crawled back to the wheel, pulled the *I'll Try* up again, seated himself upon the wet deck and with one hand and broken teeth lashed himself clumsily to the wheel, his back against it, his dying legs and feet outsprawled, inert in their heavy and sodden sea-boots; and then his weary hand fell listlessly by his side.

A thousand confused conjectures, fears, hopes, and solitudes flashed through Joshua's brain. He tried to ask the Lord of all the seas, whom he had so long followed and loved, to take charge of the ship and bring her home. Her destination was no longer of moment to him, whether it were the gateways of earthly ports or the harbor lights of that haven and heaven to which he had so long aspired. And so, clumsily lashed with his back to the wheel, unyielding to the last, still fighting when the fight was done, the faint balance of sanity swung across to peace as had the sea after the storm, and dreaming that he was in his Brixham chapel on the hill, he fell to singing in a wavering voice: "Abide with Me."

Some recess of his brain contained the words he had so many times sung, so long loved. Cracked and broken they issued between cracked and broken lips, quavering aimlessly into the air his fealty to a faith—that hymn written in the old, old port of Brixham town from which he and his forbears had sprung; and as a prelude he cried: "God, O God! Help me, for I can do no more. 'Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. . . . And I am far from home.'"

THE steam trawler *Williwaw*, after twenty days at sea, rimed by the storm, black, and with a heavy plume of smoke wallowing out of her funnel, was laying her course for Brixham Port. Captain Moran was staring at the streaks of rust and appeared anything but pleased by his inspection. His honest, sea-tanned face took on the look of preoccupation of one who is engaged in mental calculations as to the cost of paint. He was even disturbed when his mate Long, grave-eyed, came across the steel deck to him and said: "Looks to me, sir, as if there's something wrong with a ship off there to sta'b'd. Her don't act natural at all, sir."

Captain Moran turned and trudged past

the complex litter of mechanism and gear to have a look. After but a moment he shouted back to his mate: "You're right about that, Mr. Long. Run down to 'em."

The wheel in the pilot house of the *Williwaw* whirled, and she turned her nose inquisitively on the new course.

"Somethin' wrong? Aye? There be," declared one of the crew to others who came leisurely up to the starboard rail. "Her be in trouble, sure! Look at they sails, what's left of 'em, and her be yawin' this way and that as if her had no hellum."

They heard Captain Moran shout to the pilot: "Turn her loose. Put on full speed. No use in wasting time." And from the engine-room sounded the clang of shovel and slice-bar; the funnel plume blackened, and the *Williwaw* began to "foam at the mouth" as she closed down on the ketch. When her engine was rung down, a peculiar silence enveloped her that was broken by Moran's hail:

"Ahoy there! *I'll Try!* Ahoy! What's wrong with you men?"

But he evoked no answer. Under silent way the *Williwaw* bore closer, and now there became faintly audible a cracked old voice monotonously droning:

"Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me."

The voice that came quavering across the sullen waves, as if blanketed by the leaden skies, held the men of the *Williwaw* in its spell. They clung to the rail, staring with perplexed eyes and parted lips until aroused to action by Moran's shout: "Stand by to lower away a boat there, you men. Mr. Long, go over and learn what's up."

THE boat splashed into the water, and down the steel side of the *Williwaw* went the men to man it. Her screw thrust the sea again to hold her off at a safe distance, for the swells still surged and lifted forward; but the voice still carried on:

"I fear no woe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is Death's sting; where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me."

Sturdily pulled, as if eager to reach the black and battered hull of the half-wrecked *I'll Try*, the boat bobbed upward and

downward as it was rowed across the intervening space. It came alongside, where, standing, swaying, some of its rowers clutched at hand-holds, and Long, young, powerful, leaped for strake and rail. He threw a heavy boot over inboard and landed on both feet. For an instant he paused, bending forward as if doubting sight. He saw a man with white hair, stained red here and there, and with a reddened handkerchief bound awry over his head and falling over one eye. Streaks of red ran down over the disordered white beard. He saw the rope with which the man had bound himself to the wheel, and the halyard-end that had at last worked free and lay idly upon his lap. He saw the bandaged arm, the sprawling feet in sea-boots, the free wheel, and constantly he heard that same droning song of faith.

LONG rushed over and laid his hand on the broad, bent shoulder, and said: "Josh! Captain Josh! Skipper! Don't you know me—Long—of the *Williwaw*?" But the closed eye did not open or look up, and the monotonous reiteration of song went on.

The mate ran to the side and shouted: "Come aboard here, you men. This looks bad. I'm going to need help, I think."

And then, as they clambered inward, he ran to the closed companionway, lifted the hatch, recoiled from the foul air, and dis-regarding the steep steps, dropped nimbly below. A whimpering sound, as it issued from the lips of a pain-exhausted, terrified boy stabbed his ears, and with it mingled a babbling noise that could come from nothing else than human delirium.

For an instant his eyes probed the gloom until they accustomed themselves to the change from broad daylight. In one of the bunks lay a figure that was still and quiet. In another lay the man who moaned and babbled. In another lay the boy who now lifted himself to an elbow and said: "I couldn't help it, sir. Skipper, he told me to stay here and do my best. I did, sir, and—and—the old un has never spoke a word, and the second hand has taken to talkin' like that all the time; and my foot, sir, my foot—oh, it do hurt something awful, and I can't walk no more, I can't! I tried, sir, I did, and—"

Then the voice broke in a long wail of boyish grief. The strain had been too much for even that obdurate, steadfast youthful bravery.

"Steady, lad! Steady!" the mate's voice quieted him. "You're all right now. Be a sailorman. Don't give up."

The boy started to tell the tale of tragedy, but the mate of the *Williwaw* was gone and hurrying upward. On deck he shouted his discoveries to Captain Moran of the *Williwaw*, which now lay close by. No time was wasted in this urgent plight. A heavy line was brought across, a half-dozen men put aboard, and within a few minutes the *I'll Try* was being towed through the sea. The funnel of the *Williwaw* now belched smoke as if she were steaming a race against time on the reach to Brixham Town. Around the breakwater's end she swung in a flashing sweep to the outer and up to the very gates of the inner harbor before she stopped. Surmising tragedy, boats put off to meet them, and fishermen swarmed about the *I'll Try* to assist. Broken men were tenderly carried away. The harbor-master's telephone urged a surgeon to haste. The men on the landing-pier thrust and jostled, all eager to serve.

The survivors of the *I'll Try's* crew had come to port at last.

"The lad will pull through," the surgeon announced to those who waited outside the harbor-master's office, which had been turned into a temporary hospital. The second hand may, though his ribs are caved in. The old man you call Scruggs the Ancient, must have died very lately because his body is still warm. And Captain Joshua—well—they say that when they found him, he tried to tell them something about the Harbor Lights." The surgeon paused, looked away from the staring eyes,

and then added softly: "He has found them."

WHEN, taken from her iced bunkers by hand, sorted, pulled ashore to the great flagged spaces of the fishmarket, carefully laid thereon and brought to the "liberal" buyers' attention by the sonorous clang of the auctioneer's bell and voice, the catch of the *I'll Try* brought six pounds, fourteen shillings and sixpence—nearly twenty-six dollars, to be divided amongst the sole survivors of the hapless crew. Captain Joshua's share as owner and skipper came to nearly four pounds, or sixteen dollars! The undertaker charged fifteen pounds—about sixty dollars—for the coffin; the cemetery company charged five pounds, about twenty-five dollars, for the six-by-three feet of space which he might forever own as his last allotment of earth; and there were certain minor claims for flowers in that land where flowers run wild upon great cliffs, but must be paid for when laid upon a grave. All that was left thereafter, Captain Joshua's grandsons and widowed daughter might have to live upon.

Up on the Brixham hills that night rain fell. Somehow it seemed to freshen the handful of flowers that some one had thrown on the grave of the lone and ancient mariner, as if he, who after all his sea-toil had come to land-rest, merited that humble recognition. Perhaps some one loved him, as well as Skipper Joshua. Perhaps God in His majestic but kindly pity would send other wild-flowers to climb across their graves, blanketing them in the radiance of that only One who marks the sparrow's fall!

"SHERIFF DAN DOUD"

FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT, who wrote the famous "Sindbad of Oakland Creek" and "Lighthouse Tom" stories, will contribute to our next issue a novelette of exceptional interest. Be sure to read "Sheriff Dan Doud"—in the forthcoming May issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



Understanding

A joyous story about a man who thought he understood his wife, by the author of "Gallops" and "The Boomerang."

By DAVID GRAY

IT was only three o'clock, but Peter Ferry had begun clearing up his desk. The door opened, and his father's head appeared:
"Thought your vacation began at twelve noon."

Peter lifted a cardboard sign that was on its way to the wastebasket. It read: "Forget the clock, or promotion will forget you."

The old man chuckled. "Well; I'm ready to step out whenever you want to promote yourself."

"I've heard that before," said Peter.

Ferry père dropped into a chair. "When do the people come?"

"Day after tomorrow, most of 'em. Thursday's the big day."

"June second; that's right. So you've been married ten years. It doesn't seem possible, does it?"

"No. Arabella don't look a day older, does she?" He took up the framed photograph of a pretty woman and placed it carefully in a drawer. "I've been lucky, Pop."

"I don't know as it's all luck," said the old man. "You've been a decent husband, as husbands go."

"I don't know about that," said Peter modestly, "but there's one thing I have done: I've taken the trouble to study my wife and understand her. That's what counts—understanding."

The old man looked benevolently upon his son. It was the look that adorned his countenance when visiting salesmen were inviting him to buy. "Well, I'm glad," he said mildly. "Yes, understanding is the great thing in business, married life, politics and fishin'. It was what the Psalmist was always asking for."

"It's a matter of taking trouble," Peter explained. "Most men want to be understood. They want it all their way—don't want to take any trouble."

"That's right," assented the old man. "Let's see," he went on irrelevantly, "your mother and I lived together a little over forty years. Our golden wedding would have been next October."

"October sixth," said Peter. "Of course it was growing up with you and Mother that put me on to the thing. She understood you, and you understood her."

"Yes," said the old man, "yes indeed." His mouth had a whimsical twist which

Peter did not notice. He was putting things into the wastebasket. The senior Ferry rose and started back to his own office. "Have a good time," he said.

"Of course, if anything comes up, you've only got to telephone me," said Peter. "I'm only ten miles away."

"Surely, but a vacation is a vacation. Tell Arabella that my tin wedding present will go out by mail. I suppose just "tin" would be acceptable, eh?" The senior grinned at his feeble old joke.

Peter nodded. "Better change your mind and come out to dinner on Thursday."

"No," he said firmly. "Have a good time."

FIVE minutes later Peter was driving his car through the dingy quarters of the city, heading for the Lake Shore Road. He was traveling over in retrospect the years which on the approaching Thursday would round into a decade. They had been fortunate, happy years: work that he liked, sufficient money and prospects of more, and then Arabella. And Arabella meant not only a wife who was pretty and popular, but their daughter and the happy, secure, comfortable life that went on during the winter months in the town house, and from May till October in the country place on the shore.

As he escaped from the ugly suburbs and reached the country, the apple orchards were in bloom. The grass was dazzling green; the young crops were coming up. Peter realized that it was a good world if one attacked it with intelligence, if one understood the simple principles on which success in every field of life depended.

And yet in this sky of azure which spread actually and figuratively overhead there was one little cloud, not even as large as a man's hand, a mere nebulous perplexity, but withal something new to be understood. It was Arabella's unaccountable attitude toward the party they were having.

Six weeks before, she had been all enthusiasm. She had written the invitations, and everything had gone well. Five of the six bridesmaids had pledged themselves to "come on," and all of the groomsmen. Jerry Withers, the best man, was coming from New York, and of course all their friends in town would come out. But for the past week Arabella seemed to have lost interest. She seemed endlessly to be

helping the Reverend Dr. Kinsey to get settled. The Reverend Dr. was a clergyman of the modern school who had rented the place next for the summer. He was a childless widower and so he doubtless needed help. He was a worthy man in whom a maze of civic and Christian enterprises centered, and he was doubtless deserving of Arabella's assistance; but Peter felt that he would be glad when he was definitely settled. To Peter the success of the anniversary party was more important than the pampering of the Reverend Kinsey.

Peter slowed down as he reached his gateposts and turned into the driveway. Rounding a curve planted with syringa and lilac, he saw his house, low and rambling, set in its gardens with the blue lake beyond. It was a pleasant prospect. He drew up before the door, got out, and on the steps he met Arabella coming out. She was looking very lovely in a sun-hat with white tulle about it. In her hand she carried a garden trowel.

"The great vacation has begun," he announced. His spirits were high.

"Isn't it nice?" she said. "I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

There was no fault to be found with what she said, but there was something in her tone that chilled him slightly. It was the way she might have said to Araminta, their eight-year-old daughter: "Yes, that's very nice; now run away and play." It seemed to imply that his vacation would be a nice thing for him, but that it meant nothing to her.

"What's the matter, old girl?" he said affectionately. "Don't you think it's going to be fun to have the old crowd on?"

She gazed at him gravely, and there was a martyred look in her eyes. "I don't suppose you can understand that fun doesn't mean anything to me. When one thinks of the condition the world is in—but you wouldn't understand."

PETER felt as if he had received a right hook between the eyes. "Why, of course I understand," he said stoutly. "Things are pretty bad in Austria and China, but that's all the more reason why we ought to buck up and keep cheerful. Don't you think so?"

She smiled meekly and went on toward the rose-garden.

He stood a moment irresolutely. Then a light came to him. She was ill, tired out,

needed a change. Settling Kinsey was just that much more than she should have undertaken. He overtook her at the garden entrance.

"The Governor's going to send us a check for an anniversary present," he announced. "It will be five hundred, anyway, probably a thousand."

"I'm sure that's very good of him," she answered in a dead voice. "You can buy another bond."

He ignored the thrust at the sacred principle of thrift. "What I was thinking of," he went on, "is this. After the people go, suppose you and I take the roadster and go off for a week to the mountains. Just you and I. It will do us both good."

"It would be impossible for me," she answered. "But you can go."

"Why impossible for you?" he demanded.

The committee meets tomorrow to formulate the platform. After that, we shall have to get to work immediately. This anniversary party will put me three days behind, as it is."

"The committee?" he repeated. "Just what is this committee?"

She looked at him hopelessly, and the martyred look deepened. "I've told you all about it, but you never listen to anything I tell you. It's the executive committee of the Association of Civic Volunteers."

"That's right; I remember now," he said falsely. "And you're going to adopt your program tomorrow. But don't you think you'd be able to do a great deal better work if you had a little change?"

"Why is it," she said, looking at him scathingly, "that whenever I undertake some serious work, you always think I'm ill?"

"But I don't, dear. Of course you're not ill."

She laughed mirthlessly. "Don't insult my intelligence, Peter."

"I'm not," he insisted. "but a little motor-trip would be fun for both of us."

"There you go again—fun. Always fun." She moved away and began digging weeds.

He retreated to the house, found himself in the library and lighted a cigarette. This was not the way he had expected to begin his vacation. Why should being on a committee affect Arabella this way? He was on innumerable committees. It was nothing to get intense about. How-

ever, this line of thought got him nowhere. "Pshaw," he thought, "a good night's sleep is all she needs." He dismissed the subject and turned his attention to a practical matter which called for action and went out through the back of the house, and was observed by the cook descending into the cellar.

FIFTEEN minutes later Arabella, reëntering the house confronted him in the hall. "What's happened?" she demanded. "Gus has emptied the ashes," he answered.

"Well? Why not?"

"The gin!" he said hoarsely. "It's gone."

"Well, if it's gone, it's gone," she said unfeelingly. "I told you not to hide it in the ashes. It's like hiding the key under the doormat."

"But I told Gus not to touch the ashes till I told him to. You heard me. I told him particularly not to take the ashes out till I told him to, that I'd probably want to use them on the road."

"He hasn't put them on the road. Ask him what he did with them; he's in the garden."

Peter sought Gus in the garden. "What did you do with those barrels of ashes in the cellar?" he demanded.

"I hauled 'em over to Allens' lot to the dump."

"Don't you remember my telling you not to take them out till I told you to?"

"That's right, you did. Yes sir, you did tell me. I must of forgot. I wanted to get the place all cleaned up and tidy before you came out."

"How long ago did you do it?"

"Oh, about two, three weeks."

Peter hurried over to the Allens' lot. The ashes were there, and one broken gin-bottle. He returned, and found Arabella planting annuals.

"You've got some in town," she observed.

"One inch in the bottom of one bottle," he answered.

"Well, it can't be helped," she said. "There's no use getting in a stew about it."

"But the boys get here day after tomorrow."

"They'll be better off without cocktails. Jerry ought not to have anything, anyway."

"It'll be awful," he said. He stood

a while speechless. "Perhaps I might get some somewhere," he said at length.

"I hope you wont do that," she said severely.

"Why not, if I could find somebody who had some?"

"In the first place, it's against the law."

"But everybody does it."

"Yes, and they've got to stop doing it! That's one of the things the committee is going to see about."

"But Arabella, you can't have people at the house and not give them anything."

"Why not? If they come to drink, they might as well go to a saloon."

"Now, look here," he said with spirit, "it was you that ordered those cases of gin before the law was on. I'd have forgotten all about it till it was too late. You're not consistent."

"Because I've had a wrong view of the thing once, do you want me always to hold to it? Don't you believe in development?"

He turned away without answering. His loss crushed him. As he entered the house, an idea came to him. He stood stock still. "Bill would lend it to me," he muttered. "Sure he would!" He looked at his watch and hurried out to the garage. Two minutes later he was speeding toward the city.

IT was just six when Peter drew up before his front door again. Araminta, on the veranda, greeted him joyously.

"Where's your mother?" he asked.

"She's over to Mr. Kinsey's on business. She went in the runabout—on business."

Peter got out, opened the tonneau and removed a carriage-rug that covered certain objects.

"You got a puttin'-up machine?" said his daughter, pointing to a metal apparatus.

Peter nodded.

"Are you goin' to take the puttin'-up machine to the preservin'-room?"

Peter smiled. "That's the place for it."

The preserving room was a monument to Mr. Hoover. It was the old farm dairy beyond the laundry, and it contained oil stoves, running water and other requisites of food-conservation. Peter stepped into the house, got the key and returned. Presently, with the mechanical apparatus in his arms and his daughter at his side, he made his way to the preserving-room. There he deposited the burden. Then he

lifted a trap-door, descended a ladder and was presently contemplating a fifty-two gallon barrel of two-year-old Baldwin cider.

At dinner Peter made no mention of his expedition to town, and Arabella asked no questions. She had on what Peter called her "society manner." Her *a's* were broadened; her politeness was marked. She asked him what he thought of the new administration's foreign policy, and when he told her, she thanked him and said that his views were interesting.

It was an uncomfortable dinner for Peter, but there was nothing to be done about it. Arabella was tired out, but until she realized it herself, he could do nothing. He would have to wait patiently and watchfully.

She passed most of the evening at her desk writing letters and working at some sort of document. On his own account, under cover of the newspaper, he studied a typewritten document which began: "(A) To set up still, connect worm with cupola of boiler, using a few inches of rubber tubing."

AFTER breakfast the next morning Peter slipped out into the preserving-room. He encountered no difficulty in doing this. Arabella was at her desk in the library and she asked no questions as to how he was going to spend the day. She seemed to take no interest in him. . . .

It was just past eleven when the first drop dripped from the end of a copper tube into a square-faced bottle set to receive it. The bottle bore the label, "*Gordon Gin.*" It was a relic. Fifteen seconds later a second drop formed and dropped. Then each quarter of a minute a new drop appeared. At the end of a quarter of an hour the bottom of the Gordon gin-bottle was wet. But the deliberateness of the operation began to appall him. It was like some geological process. At this rate production could hardly keep pace with consumption. He must do something to speed up. He examined the burners of the oil stove and found that he could triple the intensity of the flame. Presently the boiler began to throb with a cheerful bubbling and the drops came faster. He experienced relief. He turned the flame still higher and now the drops came uninteruptedly. It was almost a trickle. By noon the bottle was three-quarters full.

He sat down and wiped his brow, for it

was hot in the preserving-room. The suspense was over. Commercial production was assured. He was content. His eyes roved idly about the room, reached the window on the north wall and came to rest on the face of his daughter pressed against the screen. Her gaze was fixed on the bottle, and as her lips moved, he knew that she was painfully spelling out the legend that adorned the label.

For a moment Peter sat startled. Discovery paralyzed him. With the ear of imagination he could hear her announcement at lunch. He had no desire to keep anything back from Arabella, but he knew that this was not the day to make it.

Araminta finished her task. Their eyes met. "The coal-man's here," she announced. "Mother's lookin' for you. She wants to know where to put it."

"Where's Gus?" he answered.

"She can't find Gus. She thinks he's gone to his dinner."

"All right," he said. "I'll be right out. He drew the blinds, put out the oil stove, went out and locked the door after him. Araminta was waiting for him.

"Father was trying the preservin'-machine," he said. "It's a secret. Want to ride piggy-back?"

Araminta wanted to ride, and they went off toward the house at a gallop. Other coal-men arrived, and then it was lunch time.

The meal passed, and there was no mention of the preserving-machine by Araminta. "What a blessed thing," thought Peter, "is the short memory of childhood."

ARABELLA seemed to have become more human since the night before. It was sleep that she needed, as he had thought. She spoke of the party and appeared to regard it with something more than resignation.

As they left the dining-room, she followed him into the library, where he went to fill a pipe.

"I hope you don't mind having the committee meet here this afternoon," she said.

"Mind? Why should I mind, dear?"

"Well, it's a sort of nuisance, but they started in doing Dr. Kinsey's floors this morning."

"But I'm delighted to have them meet here if you want them to. It won't bother me."

"I'm sure that's very good of you," she said meekly.

He looked at her doubtfully. Vague suspicion, vaguer alarm, began to stir in him.

"There's one more thing I wanted to speak to you about," she went on briskly. "Yesterday afternoon Dr. Kinsey telephoned me, and I went over at once. He wanted to tell me that it had been definitely settled about the nomination."

"Nomination?"

"The nomination to Congress. I told you all about it."

"I beg your pardon. This is the first I've heard about any nomination."

"Why, I must have told you. The trouble is you never listen to anything I tell you."

"You never told me a word about any nomination to Congress."

"Well, perhaps I didn't. There's no use quarreling about it. There's nothing much to it. Congressman Kittery is going to resign. He's got diabetes, but that's not to be spoken of. There's what they call a 'peculiar situation' locally. The regulars don't want Redfield, and the Redfield people say they'll bolt Parsons or Blanchard. Well, the party leaders don't want a split just now, and they've told Dr. Kinsey they'll nominate a woman, any woman the committee selects."

"And they're going to offer it to you?" Peter's voice was unsteady.

"I wouldn't call it an offer, exactly. It's presented to me as an obligation. I haven't any choice in the matter. You see, the committee has the opportunity to make the platform. It's a great chance."

"But why doesn't some other woman assume the obligation? You don't know anything about politics, Arabella. It's a dirty game in this district."

"Now, if you're going to start raising objections—" she began. There was a level hardness in her tone that frightened him.

"I'm not raising objections."

"Yes, you were."

"I was only saying that you didn't know anything of the bribery and crookedness and Tammany methods of local politics, and I thank God you don't."

"I sha'n't have to know anything about such things. If the regulars and the Redfield faction support me, the nomination's the same as an election."

Peter felt weak all over. What she said was true. "But if you go to Washington, how about—how about Araminta?"

"Araminta can go to school in Washing-

ton just as well as here. I shall take Miss Hewitt on with me to look after her when I am at the Capitol."

"But how about me?" he faltered.

"You could come on and visit us; and we sha'n't always be in Washington. Besides, you'd be much happier free to come and go as you please."

"Look here, Arabella," he said explosively, "are you through with me, or what's the matter?"

"Through with you?" she repeated. "I don't see how you can talk that way. You know I am very fond of you, but you can't ask me to sit about with my hands folded at a time like this."

"I've never noticed you sitting about with your hands folded. You're busy from morning till night."

"Doing what?" she demanded.

"Running the house, looking after Araminta, looking after me. It's just as important as my business."

She gave a hard laugh. "You can get a housekeeper for a hundred dollars a month that will do everything better than I do. I'll pay for her out of my salary."

He winced. "But doesn't it mean anything, our being together and doing things together, and having Araminta around?"

"I don't think I have any right to consider myself," she answered. "At a time like this, when the world is upside down, I must do my duty. We all must."

"And you consider it's your duty to go to Congress."

"I do. There is a great issue at stake."

"The thing your committee wants to get through?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"It's not officially decided as yet, but it will probably be the strict and impartial enforcement of the Volstead Act."

Peter laughed bitterly. "You mean you want to sacrifice your home and save the world by putting every guy in jail who carries a bottle?"

"If it's the law, it ought to be enforced. Dr. Kinsey has a powerful sermon that he is going to preach on Sunday on the subject. He says the rich with their stocks of liquor and their home-brews are debauching the moral sense of the country."

"I've never seen him refuse a cocktail when he's dined with us."

"I don't see what that has to do with it. He's a gentleman. He knows that

what little we have, we got before the law went into effect. Do you mean to say," she went on, "that you believe in breaking law?"

"Of course I don't."

"But if you had a chance to buy a case of gin, you'd buy it?"

"Yes, I would," he said honestly.

"Well, there you are. You're the kind of man that is debauching the moral sense of the country. What use is there in getting rid of the saloon when people like you are ready to encourage lawbreaking?"

PETER made no answer. Presently he said: "You think by passing more laws and putting people in jail, you're going to make the world better?"

"I'm going to do my duty; that's all."

"And you've absolutely made up your mind."

"I haven't any choice in the matter. It's an obligation. Of course, the nomination hasn't been offered me. But it will be this afternoon, and I shall have to accept it. I'm sorry that you are displeased. I had hoped that you would be proud."

"You know where this will end?" he asked gloomily.

She shook her head.

"In the divorce-court."

"Well," she said resolutely, "if you'd be happier free, I sha'n't stand in your way. If you can't accept the new views of marriage, if you can't see that we're both bound to be happier when each of us is doing his duty as a citizen, I can't help it."

The silence lengthened. He looked at her miserably. "Arabella—" he began. There was anguish and pleading in his voice. Then he heard a motorcar stopping before the front door.

Arabella rose. "The committee is arriving," she said, and hurried out into the hallway.

He heard women's voices and laughter. He caught a snatch of what Arabella was saying. It was: "My dear, that hat is too heavenly."

Peter sat dumbly in the armchair, conscious of himself as one "stricken," bereft of wife, of child, of home. An hour before, the room, delightful with Arabella's genius, the pleasant, comfortable house expressing Arabella in every detail, had been his home, the birthplace of his child. Now it was his no longer. He had

no home. He had nothing but the pain of heartache, and even that began to leave him, as is the nature of pain. He was a vacuum.

Every few minutes other motors drew up before the house, depositing other members of the committee. Conversation ensued in the hallway as Arabella met each new deputation. Once he recognized Kinsey's tones. His anger rose. It was Kinsey who was the serpent in the house, who had worked this evil. He would cheerfully have "scotched" Kinsey's head, but the man was in the drawing-room surrounded by admiring women and two cultivated gentlemen feminists.

Twenty minutes had slipped away when another motorcar drew up, crunching the gravel. Peter gave it no conscious notice. His mind explained it as a belated deputation to the committee, which had probably already voted his doom. He heard the bell ring in the back part of the house and the footsteps of the maid answering it. Almost immediately the door into the library opened. "There is a gentleman here who wishes to see you," said the maid.

PETER stepped into the hall and faced a tall, lean man in a "Prince Albert" coat. He might have been a rustic statesman or a small-town undertaker.

"Sorry to trouble you, brother," he said, "but my friend has fainted. He's in the car."

"Is it serious?" asked Peter. He had visions of a corpse in the motorcar. He shrank from facing it.

"Well, he's fainted. I don't know. Could you give me a spoonful of brandy?"

"Haven't any brandy."

"Well, any kind of alcohol, something to get his heart acting. We'd better get him into the house and lay him flat."

"Yes," said Peter, skuddering.

They bore the sick man into the library and laid him on the sofa. Fortunately he was small.

Peter hurried out through the kitchen to the preserving-room. He returned with the bottle containing the product of the morning and a tumbler.

"I think he's coming to," said the man in the Prince Albert. "You are very kind, sir. My name is Becker."

"My name is Ferry," said Peter. He began to pour.

The sick man muttered incoherently.

"Don't give him much," said Mr. Becker. "Is it strong?"

"Try it?" asked Peter.

Mr. Becker raised a hand in protest. "I never partake," he said. "Neither does Al, except medicinally."

They were facing a screen that stood by Arabella's desk. The end panel moved. Both men started.

Then Araminta's head appeared shyly from behind it. "My father made that gin," she said.

The sick man raised his head. He seemed to have been shocked into consciousness. Becker, too, seemed impressed.

"You say your father made this gin, little girl?"

Araminta nodded proudly. "In the preservin'-room this mornin'. I see'd him fro' the winda. My father can make anythin'."

Peter smiled deprecatingly.

"Is this true?" asked Mr. Becker.

"Yes, only it isn't gin," Peter answered.

"It's applejack."

"This is regrettable," said Mr. Becker, "very regrettable."

"What's the matter?" demanded Peter.

"If alcohol is all you wanted, what's the difference whether it's gin or applejack?"

MR. BECKER wagged his head dolefully. "That isn't the point," he said; "and you've been so kind, too. It goes against the grain."

"What's wrong?" Alarm and indignation mingled in Peter's tone.

"I had no idea that anything of this kind was going on here." Mr. Becker continued. "I thought there would be a little supply of lawfully possessed spirit for medicinal purposes, but not this kind of thing."

"You mean you have principles against giving your friend home-made stuff?"

"I don't need anything," said the friend. "I'm better."

"Be quiet, Al," said Mr. Becker.

"What's all this about?" demanded Peter.

"We are enforcement officers," said Mr. Becker.

Peter looked from one to the other. A sickly smile parted his lips. "Well," he said with a forced joviality, "it's easy to forget."

Mr. Becker shook his head. "I wish it were possible to forget, but we're un-

der oath. —Al," he said to the convalescent, "this is bad business."

"It's bad business," said Al. "And he's been so kind."

"Al," said Mr. Becker, "would you be willing to stand by me and recommend a fine?"

Al hesitated. "I'd do anything that was right," he answered. "But would the recommendation go? There's been so much of this kind of thing."

"You don't mean you'd arrest me for trying to help your sick friend?" cried Peter.

"What else can we do? Put yourself in our place," replied Mr. Becker.

Araminta's lip began to tremble.

"Go out, dear," said Peter. Father's all right." He led her to the door, put her out and closed the door after her.

"With that beautiful child and this luxurious home, why did you do such a thing, Mr. Ferry?" asked the convalescent.

"Oh, come," said Peter, "cut out that stuff."

"You ought not to talk that way, Mr. Ferry," said Mr. Becker. "You're a prominent citizen, obligated to uphold the law. Think of the example you are setting to that innocent little girl."

"Look here," said Peter, "can't you understand? I'm not in this as a business. I had a dozen bottles of gin that got thrown out by mistake and I've got a wedding-anniversary party coming tomorrow. Can't you understand I don't sell it? Have a heart."

"Old stuff, brother," said Al.

"You're the type of man we are instructed to make examples of," said Mr. Becker. "If we should let you off, why should we arrest others?"

"Why arrest others if it's a case like mine?"

"There you are," said Al to his associate. "No realizing sense of what he's done."

"No," said Mr. Becker finally, "we've got to do it. Where are the cuffs, Al?"

"They're in the car; he'll go peaceably."

"Do you mean to say you'd handcuff me and rush me to the hoosegow for giving a sick man a drop of alcohol?" said Peter.

"We have no choice," said Mr. Becker. "We're responsible for you."

"But I'll appear, all right. I've got property. I own this place."

"Real estate doesn't protect us," said Al. "How do we know it's yours?"

AT this juncture the door opened and Arabella came in. She looked at the two strangers, then at Peter. "What's the matter?" she demanded.

"I am arrested," Peter answered.

"Have you been speeding again?"

"Lady," said Mr. Becker, "this gentleman is under arrest for unlawful manufacture and possession of alcoholic spirits."

Peter met her look defiantly. The exaltation of despair had transported him. His home was broken, his life blighted; what difference did anything make? "Yes," he said, "it's true."

To his amazement Arabella laughed musically. "Well, isn't that ridiculous!" Her innocent gaze was fixed on Mr. Becker. "What are we going to do about it?"

"Just what do you mean, lady?" he answered guardedly.

"How are we going to fix it up? You know all about such things. I have to rely on you."

"Well, he's arrested," said Mr. Becker. "He'll have to be tried."

"Of course," she assented, "and he'll be fined. What I want to know is how much will it be and how does he pay it?"

Al looked mournfully at the floor. "If he's lucky enough to get a fine, it would be five hundred at the least."

"That's what I wanted to know," said Arabella. "Now, you see, Mr. Ferry can give you the money, and you can fix it up and that will be the end of the matter."

"They can't do that," said Peter.

"And why not?" asked Arabella.

"Why, it's—" he stopped abruptly. He had received a "look."

"Why, of course they can," she said cheerily. "Peter, dear, run upstairs, and you'll find my black bag in the top drawer of my bureau. The money to pay the servants is in it."

Peter went.

"Of course, this is somewhat irregular," said Mr. Becker doubtfully. He turned to Al. "Do you think we could take a chance with the judge?"

"It might get us in bad, but he was so kind to me—"

"It won't get you in bad," said Arabella. "If it's necessary, I'll see the judge myself. Otherwise I shall never mention the matter to a soul."

"Well—" said Mr. Becker.

"Then we'll call it settled," said Arabella, "and I'm very much obliged to you. It's fortunate it's the end of the month, or I shouldn't have had a cent in the house."

PETER returned with the bag. Arabella counted out the money and paid it over to Mr. Becker. "You needn't give me a receipt," she said. "We'll get that from the judge."

"Exactly," said Mr. Becker.

"Now, I'll have to ask you to excuse me," said Arabella. "I have a meeting in the other room."

"We must be going ourselves," said Mr. Becker. "Good afternoon, ma'am." He took the bottle labeled "*Gordon Gin*," bowed politely and followed by Al, withdrew. Peter escorted them to their car. He noted that it was a new, very smart-looking coupé of a fashionable make. The engine fired at the first turn and they rolled off.

Upon his return to the library, Peter found Arabella still there.

"Well," she said coldly, "that was a nice mess you got me into. Don't you ever think of anyone but yourself?"

"You've got yourself in a worse one, bribing Government officers."

"Fiddlesticks! I've paid your fine to keep the thing out of the papers."

"Fine, nothing! You fixed 'em, and you know it just as well as they do. If you could get away with that, there's nothing in politics that will stop you. I apologize for what I said about your not knowing politics."

"Do you want to go to jail?"

"I don't care."

"Then you might think of your wife and daughter. It's bad enough as it is, having her come in before the committee and say you'd been arrested."

"She said I'd been arrested?"

"How do you suppose I knew? You might remember it's for speeding, and the constables dropped in to leave the subpoena or whatever they call it."

Peter made no reply, and she went out, leaving the door open. He could hear the hush that greeted her return to the drawing-room, then laughter and the hum of conversation. Evidently she had made the story about the constables and the speed-violation humorous. She was a woman who might go far in politics.

Presently he heard the patter of a child's footsteps on the gravel drive, then laborious lifting of short legs up high steps, then a scamper across the veranda into the house. As Araminta passed the library doorway, Peter had a glimpse of her. She was hurrying earnestly toward the drawing-room, and under her arm she carried the bottle labeled "*Gordon Gin*."

He sprang forward, but too late to stop her. By the time he had reached the hall, she had disappeared. The committee's conversation hushed again. He heard his daughter's voice piping shrilly: "Mother, those men who arrested father for makin' gin said I was to give this back to you. They said you was entitled to it."

A momentary hush, and the sonorous tones of the Reverend Dr. Kinsey said: "I am confident this is a misunderstanding which can readily be explained."

Peter, who had reached the door, did not hesitate. He went in.

"It can be," he said. "My wife has nothing to do with this matter. She knew nothing about it. If she wants to go into politics, I see no reason why my views on the liquor-question should affect her. I believe in drinking like a gentleman. She doesn't. That's all. —Give me that bottle," he said to Araminta. She gave it to him, and he left the conclave.

He felt taller as he walked out upon the lawn. He had played the man. But emotion and the unaccustomed strain of public speaking left him weak. Bearing the bottle, he turned toward the preserving-room. "A little of this will do me good," he thought.

He let himself in, poured moderately into a tumbler and turned to the water-tap. Then curiosity arrested him. He had never tasted spirit in its undiluted strength. With his left hand on the faucet, the right raised the glass to his lips.

Surprise and perplexity followed. He tasted again. The evidence of the senses pronounced it water flavored with vinegar.

He filled a measuring-beaker from the bottle and plunged into it the hydrometer supplied him with the apparatus. The graduated scale registered almost nothing. There was indication of less than one-half per cent of alcoholic content.

Had the officers made a substitution? It was unlikely. Where could they have

got the water flavored with vinegar? What motive had they? It seemed to Peter more probable that they too had tasted it. But in that case why had they not returned with the five hundred dollars explaining that unlawful intent alone does not establish crime. Possibly, of course, Mr. Becker would return the money later to Arabella. He left it at that, and turned his inquiry to the failure in alcoholic content. As he reread the typed instructions his eye dwelt upon paragraph G:

Use thermometer continually and maintain temperature between 165 and 170 Fahr. Alcohol boils at 165. If temperature is allowed to reach 212, you will be distilling water, as alcohol vapor will escape under pressure around cover of boiler.

Peter had used no thermometer. He had overlooked paragraph G. He dumped the beaker into the sink and laughed mirthlessly.

So he had never made applejack, had broken no law. His brain reeled. It was all about nothing. Yet the consequences were real. He had estranged Arabella beyond hope of reconciliation. If he had been patient, very likely she would have got tired of politics in a few months and resigned. But now she would go through with it if it killed her. She was furious with him, and in a sense with justice. That she was planning to desert him and rob him of his child did not justify him in lawbreaking. Yet he had broken no law. It was all about nothing except that he had lost his wife and child forever. How ridiculous! What a mud-dle! Yet that was life.

He went out, stole around the barn and made for the woods on the hill. He looked back and saw his pleasant house and grounds, as it were for the last time. He would put the place in the market at once. He would go back to his father and try to comfort him in his last years. He would work for Araminta, who would probably be allowed to pay him visits. He pushed deeper into the woods, sat down on a log and contemplated the desolate future.

IT was nearly seven when he returned to what had been his home. He went in and unostentatiously ascended the stairs to his room. There, according to habit, he began to change for dinner. In the

adjoining room he heard Arabella moving about, but he made no sign. Presently Arabella's voice sounded: "Is that you, Peter? Are you in there?"

"Yes," he answered.

"There's a telegram just come from Jerry. He's arriving tonight by motor."

"I see."

"And somebody tried to get you on the telephone about twenty minutes ago. Where have you been?"

"Just around the place, up on the hill."

There was a pause; then: "Will Jerry be here for dinner?"

"I'm sure I don't know. —Will you come over and hook this for me? Caton's gone to her supper."

He went in as if to a strange woman's room and began to hook gingerly. "There's one of these eyes missing," he said. She stretched a long arm around, searched with her fingers and found it for him.

"Isn't there some of that white wine left?" she said suddenly.

"No," he answered. "Why?"

"I was thinking that if Jerry gets here for dinner, we ought to have something for him to drink."

"I thought you didn't approve?" he began.

"I don't. But he always has wine on his own table."

"Well, he won't get anything here. I should think with your running for Congress on a strict-enforcement platform—"

She looked at him in amazement. "Where did you hear that I was running for Congress on a strict-enforcement platform?"

"Where did I hear?" he gasped. "Didn't the committee offer you the nomination?"

"Oh, the committee," she said, as if recalling long-past events. "Yes, they offered it, but it was an impossible idea. It seemed I'd have to be in Washington in summer, and you know I can't stand heat. You remember that day we had in Washington in June?"

"Then you're not going?"

"Why, of course not. How queer you act! What ails you, Peter?"

He made no reply. He started back to his dressing-room.

"Do you like my hair this way?" she asked.

He turned again. "I think it's lovely," he said truthfully.

"Then kiss me nicely," she said.

He acceded to her request and walked unsteadily away.

As he slipped his jacket on, he heard the telephone ring in the lower hall.

"Will you answer it?" she called.

He said he would and hurried downstairs.

A MAN'S voice was asking if this was Mr. Ferry.

"Yes, this is Mr. Ferry; who am I talking to?"

"The sheriff," was the answer. "Did a couple of birds call on you this afternoon in a swell coupé?"

"There was a man named Becker, and a friend who was sick."

"One of 'em wears a Prince Albert like a minister?"

"Yes."

"They're the boys. Did you notice the car number?"

"No; why?"

"They stole it."

"Stole it?"

"Yeah. Say, did the guy in the Prince Albert want a drink for his sick friend and then pretend he was a Volstead buzzard and try to hold you up?"

"He tried to. What I gave him, though, hadn't any alcohol in it."

"That was a good one."

"Yes, have they pinched them?"

"Not yet, but I hear he's been working the road to town and I wanted to find out who was hurt. Lucky you didn't open up. They work it both ways—pinch your stock and if you're easy, shake you down besides."

"Well, I hadn't any stock."

"Well, that's bad luck," said the sheriff. "Much obliged."

Peter hung up. As he stepped out into the hall, Arabella was on the stairs.

"What do you mean by saying that what you gave them hadn't any alcohol in it?" she demanded.

"Just what I say," he answered.

"But why did you give them all that money, then?"

"Why did I give them—" he began. He stopped and walked toward the door.

"What a funny man!" she murmured. She came down the rest of the way, straightened a bough of apple blossoms in the vase on the hall table and followed him out on the veranda.

The raucous screech of a motor-siren

greeted her and a moment later Jerry drove up in a low-hung roadster.

"Did you get my wire?" he shouted.

"We did indeed!" said Arabella. "We're delighted."

"Room for the bus?"

He was told there was room.

"Say," he said, "how are you off for the stuff?"

"Don't ask us," said Arabella. "It's a tragedy; Peter hid it in the furnace ashes, and it got thrown out. Can you fancy anyone but a man doing such a thing?"

"I cannot," said Jerry cheerily, "but it's all right. Father had a hunch. Careful!" He passed a suitcase to Peter, who sagged joyfully under its weight. "Packed a dozen bottles in the old kit-bag, eh, what?"

"Aren't you wonderful!" Arabella exclaimed. "Take out his other bag, Peter, and go with him to the garage. You don't know what it means to us, Jerry, to have you come on for the party!"

TOWARD midnight Peter Ferry was sitting on the foot of his guest's bed. He had accompanied him to his room an hour before to see if he "had everything." If they had been girls, the conference would have been called a "back-hair party."

"Say, but Arabella's looking fine," Jerry observed. "You're shot with luck, Pete. I ought to have got married. It must be great to have a wife—a pal, you understand—you know what I mean."

"Of course," said Peter. "You ought to do it. It's all right."

"Yes, I ought to do it, but you know a good many draw blanks. It isn't everyone that has your luck, Pete."

"That's right."

"I've been about a good deal," Jerry continued, lighting a last cigarette, "and I've kept my eyes open, and I've thought a lot; but say, these ladies are mysteries to me. I suppose, though, when you've been married ten years, you get to understand them?"

"Sure," said Peter.

"And it's understanding the one you're hooked up to that makes it go, eh?"

"Sure," said Peter.

Jerry failed to note it, for his acquaintance with the elder Ferry was slight, but at that moment Peter looked strangely like his father listening benevolently to visiting salesmen.



The Drivin' Fool

The thrilling story of a fast cross-continent drive, by the author of "Sammy Gets Experience," and "Baby Shoes."

By WILLIAM F. STURM

"SOME snappy-lookin' boat you got there!" The attendant at the Nevada Garage, in Carson City, so far lost his business sense in admiration of the sleek roadster as to venture the remark before the customary: "How many?"

"She'll do," the young man in the driver's seat answered as he climbed out.

"Tourist?" ventured the gasoline-dispenser. "From the East?"

"Boy, can't you read a California license when it jumps at you and barks?" The driver removed his yellow goggles and wiped the accumulated dust carefully from the inside, where it had sifted through the finely-woven gauze around the lenses.

"I can read a California license when it jumps at me and barks, but not when it is covered a foot deep with Nevada mud. Better get those plates washed off a bit. Mister, or some of them slick California motor-cops will be slamming a right hand down in front of your drivin' eye—and you know that means a few iron men and costs when you tell it to the judge."

After enduring this advice, the buyer of the gasoline pulled his watch from the upper pocket of his coat, frowned and then asked: "Just what time is it? This little old Waterbury seems to have run out."

"Ten bells," the gasoline-pumper grunted, fishing his watch back into place with one hand while he continued pumping with the other.

"You must have been in the Navy," facetiously remarked the customer. "Ten o'clock! And do you still call it two hundred and fifty-three miles to San Francisco?"

"Just about that. And not what I'd call first-class goin'," though it aint so bad, at that."

AT six o'clock that evening Hal Locke shot his roadster into the family garage, climbed out a trifle stiffly, walked into the house, went to his room, took a bath, shaved, dined hastily and at eight-thirty was bounding across the brick-laid sidewalk which separated him from Sylvia Moorehead.

"How are you, Little Old Peaches and Cream?"

"I'm all right, Hal. Did you see the big fire on Van Ness Avenue this morning?"

"No, I didn't. Fact is, I was in Carson City this morning."

"Now, Hal, I know you are a fast driver, but you weren't in Carson City this morning."

"Well,"—and the boyish grin that overspread the speaker's face made her wish to reach out and hug him and rumple his hair,—"honest, now, Sylvia, my old watch stopped, and before I knew it, it was ten o'clock. And there I was in Carson City, and here you were in St. Francis Wood, and I wasn't going to let a little old thing like a few miles prevent my seeing you, not while my motor was moting. And here I am."

"Do you mean to tell me you drove from Carson here since ten o'clock this morning? Why, it isn't nine yet! What time did you get home? Don't story to me, young man!" A shaking index finger enforced the admonition.

The young man could not have storied to her if he had wanted to—and he didn't want to. He understood Sylvia, and she understood him.

"The old monastery bells were chiming six when I rolled into the garage. Then I did some little things like taking a shower, eating, shaving and so on. Then I reported directly here."

"Hal Locke, if you don't quit your fast driving, I'll never, never, have anything more to do with you—honest, I won't. Father doesn't like it, either."

"Now, Sylvia! I have to work off my surplus pep some way, and I do like to travel fast. You know I'm careful, and you know the old yellow bus can't be turned over with a derrick. She'll stay right side up, no matter how fast I shoot her around the corners!"

HAL hopped out of bed the next morning, took an invigorating shower and ate breakfast. Then he sat down and read the sporting page. After which he turned to the first page. By the time the senior Locke had finished his breakfast, the young man was ready to go downtown.

"Riding with me this morning, Dad?"

"Not unless you let me do the driving, I'm not."

"In that case, we'd better start right

away if we expect to get there in time for lunch." And out to the garage they went, arm in arm, two old cronies.

From St. Francis Wood the elder Locke steered the car down to the congested business district of the city. At the corner of Market and Geary the driver held out his hand for the turn. The traffic man held up an imperious hand for a moment, while the cross-traffic streamed by.

"You paralyzed this morning?" The question was directed at the passenger lolling beside his father. Behind the remark was the memory of a dash up to the corner and much murmuring if the car were held an instant. He knew Hal Locke, as did practically every traffic man in town, those that indulged him and those that held him to the strict letter of the law—which last, it must be said, were few.

"Well, Jerry, Dad says I travel too fast, and he is showing me how to do it. It has taken him over twenty minutes to get here, and it never takes me any way near that long—and I never ran over anyone, either. And say, Jerry, take this cigar home to your wife."

"Sure, we can't take presents while on duty," the traffic man expostulated weakly as the car slid on.

"Throw it away, then!" the giver of the gift yelled back as the car gathered momentum.

"You're a great kiddier, my boy," Jerry muttered as he removed his cap and deftly deposited the cigar therein.

THE owners of the Golden Gate Packing Company had reason to smile as they greeted each other that morning, or any other morning, for that matter. With wonderful business acumen, H. A. Locke and J. C. Moorehead had purchased the company outright, when it had seemed to be on its last legs, had borrowed five hundred thousand dollars and were looking forward to paying off the loan within a few weeks. So it was not at all out of place for President Moorehead to greet vice-President Locke and his son with a smile and a hearty "Good morning."

"I was talking to one of the salesmen after you left the office last night, H. A.," the president began, "and he tells me he has landed Miner & Company. Got a nice order, too. With that opening in Chicago, we should soon be able to close a lot of others in the Middle West. Tells me that on his next trip out he is going

to make Indianapolis, and Burman & Whitmore will be our distributors there. The whole country will soon know all about Golden Gate canned fruit."

"If the old boy feels so chesty," thought Hal to himself later in the day, "now is my chance." So he slipped nervously into Moorehead's office.

"Mr. Moorehead, Sylvia and I have come to the conclusion—that is—I'd like to marry your daughter!"

"Well, I can't see anything strange in that. Several other young men would like to do the same, I fancy, judging by the sessions they hold out at my house."

"Yes, but Sylvia wishes to marry me. And you can't say that about the rest of them." The boy considered that a clincher.

"Oh, she does!"

"She told me so last night."

Sylvia's father placed his cigar slowly and carefully on the edge of his desk before he tilted back in his chair.

"Just what are your prospects on which you base your hopes of being able to provide for a wife?"

"I am a young man, in good health, and my prospects for the future with the firm here you know, perhaps, better than I."

Luckily for Hal, he was not a mind-reader, and his interviewer gave no outward indication of his thoughts.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"Habits?"

"I don't gamble; I belong to a club or two; I believe in so living that I can look the whole world in the face and tell it to go to."

"Fine sentiment. No particularly bad habits you are ashamed of? Likely to change?"

"I smoke a great deal and lie awake in bed reading, but I don't know which of these terrible habits is the worst." The boy was congratulating himself that he was passing through the fiery furnace without any particularly obnoxious smell of burning cloth. But his inquisitor was not yet through.

"What about your insane desire to drive an automobile at top speed at all times? Don't you call that a bad habit?"

"Now, Mr. Moorehead, you know I don't drive an automobile at top speed at all times. Why, just this morning I rode down with Dad, and it took almost twenty-five minutes to get here."

"Without asking you, I know your Dad was driving. I suppose you usually get here in nineteen or twenty minutes."

"No, in seventeen or eighteen."

"Well, that's entirely too fast. And that's my objection to you as my daughter's husband. You're irresponsible. You can't curb that mania for fast driving. You'll have a bad accident some day—they all do. If you married Sylvia, you'd be killing her too. When you get ready to give up fast driving I may consider the matter. If—"

"You mean not to drive fast at all? Just poke along like a funeral all my life! Not be alive!"

"You listen to me." The boy inwardly came to attention at the new note in the speaker's voice. "Your father and I have been friends for many years. We have been business associates for as many years as we have been friends. If you should ever develop into the same kind of man your father is, there is nothing I should like better than to call you son-in-law. But you have given no indication that you are treading that road. Just the opposite! Instead of buckling down and making all you can out of business and gaining a reputation in this town as a rising young business man, what reputation have you? You'd rather make a road-record from San Francisco to Salt Lake any day than to sell a hundred-thousand-dollar contract for the Golden Gate Packing Company to Barker & Barker in Salt Lake. Your name is banded from mouth to mouth throughout California! 'The Drivin' Fool!' That's what they call you, and you know it! When you are mentioned in the newspapers, it is in headlines on the sporting pages. Look at this!"

MOOREHEAD held out the *Chronicle*, which he had picked up from his desk, and shook a finger wrathfully at the headline:

THE DRIVIN' FOOL HANGS
UP ANOTHER FAST RECORD

Hal Locke Comes Through From Carson in
Eight Hours—Best Previous Time, Ten
Hours and Five Minutes.

"You beat the Lark to Los Angeles and beat it back to San Francisco. You drive to Salt Lake in so many hours. You have gone to Omaha in such and such a time. The world knows you for these things and

nothing else. Why, you are even being pointed out in the streets to Eastern tourists as one of the Coast exhibits!: 'Passing us in the yellow roadster is Hal Locke, the Drivin' Fool. He holds more inter-city records than any other driver on the Coast!' That's what you have come to. Think I wish my daughter riding in a car with you and have attention focused on her like that!"

There was no mistaking the heat now; the smell of burning cloth assailed the plaintiff's nostrils pungently. The fiery furnace was burning briskly.

"When you can tell me you are through with fast driving, I *may*, as I told you a moment ago, listen to your marrying my daughter; but until you can tell me, and prove it by your actions, just consider yourself in the class with the other young men you just mentioned."

The young man arose, his status as a suitor perfectly clear to him.

"HAL asked me about marrying Sylvia."

The two partners had been discussing business and now turned to personal matters. "And I told him that when he could tell me he was through with fast driving, I would consider the question," Moorehead compressed his lips, as though setting himself for the counter-attack from his listener.

"Don't you think you are rather hard on the boy, J. C.? That unquenchable spirit of his is simply the youth in him. You had it. I had it. We may not have driven fast cars—but only because we had no fast cars to drive. We stepped a merry pace in the things we liked. He's a good boy, if he is my own. Fine as can be! And when he settles down and directs that energy into business, he'll be a wonder. He's just evolving. He's perfectly natural. His next step will be to pass up such things as you object to. He's been through the attic stage, the kite-and-sling-shot stage, the football stage; and he'll soon put the fast-driving stage behind him."

"I know how you feel about it, H. A. But Sylvia is *my* daughter. Say what you will, his escapades interfere with business. He can't be one hundred per cent efficient if he is always thinking of how soon he can get away to do this or that fast driving. It's dangerous, besides. There isn't one single good thing to be said for an accomplishment like that. It can serve no good purpose—not a single one. And

I have absolutely forbidden Sylvia to get into the car with him."

"You needn't have done that. Hal wouldn't take any chance of hurting Sylvia. He worships her. And he's a one-woman man, J. C. But he's young. That covers a multitude of faults. I wish he would cut it out myself. But when I talk to him about it, he can convince me in a minute that he can handle his car at any speed and under any conditions. Says he expects to settle down, but he must have some exercise before he does."

"Well, as long as he is intent on *exercise*,"—the president spat the word out,—*"he needn't think of marrying Sylvia!"* And he stormed out of the room.

THE matter was much discussed that evening between the two most interested.

"You know, Sylvia, honey, I don't think your father has any right trying to regulate my private affairs. He should know I'd never take a chance with you in the car. That ought to be enough."

"Listen, boy. With Dad giving up his most precious possession,"—Hal could not see in the darkness whether a smile went with this remark,—*"he naturally wishes to safeguard it. And I don't blame him. I'm all he has, and he's all I have—I mean besides you."*

"All right, angel: let's let it go at that."

"You surely must think a lot of me, if you can't do what he wishes!"

"It's not that, Sylvia. But I'm not going to make a promise that I am liable to break. And I'm going to marry you, too. But I'm not just six years old, to have some one man tell me what I can do and what I can't do. Let's run away and get married!"

By the suddenness of the remark the girl knew that it was not premeditated, though the knowledge did not lessen the acidity of her reply. "We won't discuss that at all. We had better go into the house." The lawn discussion was not much more satisfactory than the office discussion had been.

"MR. BROWNLEE, will you please see that our certified check for five hundred thousand dollars is in the mails for Grayson & Company before the first? As you know, the money is due in New York by noon of the seventh." Though it lacked a month of the seventh, the presi-

dent was anxious that it be sent in plenty of time.

"Very well, sir; I shall attend to it."

But if Mr. Moorehead had known what was passing through Brownlee's mind, he would have given further thought to the matter. It might have been considered rather peculiar that Brownlee should be intrusted with the task, for he was not of the firm, but the representative of Grayson & Company, sent to watch the interests of the financial house. And the two partners would have been mightily surprised could they have looked over the shoulder of Brownlee, as he sat before a typewriter after business hours that evening and typed vigorously. A mouse in the wastebasket rustled the refuse slightly in a vain attempt to find another succulent bit of candy dropped there by the stenographer that afternoon. The man at the typewriter jumped nervously when he heard the noise, and his hand trembled. And if the mouse could have read and talked, it could have negotiated a pension for life from the Golden Gate Packing Company in exchange for the information.

IN the palatial offices of Grayson & Company, in New York's financial district, Grayson had just finished reading the letter with the San Francisco postmark. The forbidding "*Personal*" had caused it to pass unopened through the hands of Grayson's secretary, though that close-mouthed young man knew it was from Brownlee.

"Jackson, have Mr. Van Gorder come in as soon as possible."

When Jackson returned with word that Van Gorder would be right in, he was dismissed with a curt: "We won't need you for an hour, Jackson." And the dismissed one had his own private opinion as to why the business was so secret that no one except Grayson and the "& Company" would know of it.

"Brownlee writes glowingly of the Golden Gate Packing Company. Now, if we can manage to absorb that business through default of payment, I know a group of men out there who will be glad to take it off our hands at two million." Grayson reverently flicked the ash from his cigar into the tray.

"When did this wild idea enter your head? I don't like it." Van Gorder walked over to the window, hands thrust deeply into his pockets, and looked out over the city.

"We made the loan two years ago," began Grayson. "The contract reads, as do all of our contracts, that the money is to be paid in our office by certified check. That usually is just a matter of form, as you know. But this case is different. The Golden Gate Company is needed by the Combine, and I can't refuse. Money is not the prime consideration. What is desired is to eliminate competition. The Golden Gate has had an opportunity to sell to the Combine, but won't do it. We are not in position to refuse any business favor we can possibly grant the Combine. And its legal counsel was up here and asked to see the contract. He grasped the idea immediately, and pointed out how it would be possible for us to gain our end legally, so to speak. All we have to do is have our man out there delay the sending of the check until it is too late to reach us by the time specified."

"But are you sure of the legality of the penalty-clause?" Van Gorder spoke nervously. He was a younger man than Grayson, and less used to putting his conscience on the shelf.

"Absolutely air-tight. They signed it with their eyes open. There are no release-clauses in it. It means what it says. And we shall hold them to the letter of it. A certified check in our hands at twelve noon of September seventh. Not a telegraphic order, not a payment to Brownlee, but a certified check in our office."

"Well, what is to prevent their getting the check here on time?"

"Nothing at all, if it gets into the mails on time, but that is where Brownlee comes in—he is to see that it doesn't get into the mails on time. No one suspects him. They see in him only our representative, anxious to protect our interests, but also anxious to have the money paid so he may be relieved of his responsibility and get back to New York. They know he will lend every assistance to aid the payment." Grayson chuckled. "Our only concern is to avoid getting caught. We must not in any way be connected with the delaying of the check."

WEEKS passed.

"Did you see the newspapers?" Moorehead excitedly asked his partner.

"Yes. That strike will inconvenience our deliveries. We can use motortrucks for near-by hauls, but I guess our long-distance shipping will have to wait. We—"

"I was not thinking of our long-distance *shipping*. I was thinking of that certified check that must be in New York by noon of September seventh. We are too late now to get it there. The railway workers have sewed the railroads up tight. There will not be a wheel turning tomorrow. That means that there won't be any mail going out, either. And our certified check for five hundred thousand dollars is still in the safe."

"I imagine we shall not have any trouble in making payment." The vice-president was clearly not inclined to borrow trouble.

"We can settle it right now," his partner exclaimed. "Miss Burns, have Mr. Brownlee step in here."

Mr. Brownlee came.

"Mr. Brownlee, we understand there is going to be a railroad strike and that will make it impossible for us to deliver our certified check to Grayson & Company by noon of September seventh. Will you take the check and give us your company's receipt?"

"I shall be more than pleased to accommodate you in any way that I can. Perhaps we had better read your contract, Mr. Moorehead, and see what it says. I admit that I have given the matter little thought and do not know conditions."

Moorehead went to the safe for the contract. "It is plain as to its provisions: 'Interest shall be paid at six-month intervals, January first and July first, and the principal sum shall be paid by certified check at the office of Grayson & Company, in New York City, by twelve noon of September seventh. In case of default of any of these terms, said Grayson & Company shall take over the said Golden Gate Packing Company.'"

"Isn't there a clause there, Mr. Moorehead, giving you relief in case of war, acts of God, fire, floods, accidents, riots, strikes, labor-disturbances and delays in transportation, over which you have no control? That is customary in the delivery contract of goods, and perhaps you were thoughtful enough to have it inserted in your contract with us. I personally should not wish to be responsible for taking the money and giving you a receipt, since the contract so plainly implies that the money must be in the form of a certified check delivered in New York."

Moorehead's voice shook. "No, there is nothing here. But surely Mr. Grayson will listen to reason. Miss Burns, get

Grayson & Company, New York, on the wire."

MOOREHEAD turned a troubled face to his partner after Brownlee had left the room. "I don't like this thing, H. A. We'd be in a mess if we could not make some arrangement with Grayson. There is no likelihood of getting this rail-strike settled for a week, at any rate. And by that time we are too late."

"Let's not cross the bridge until we come to it," Locke answered quietly.

After a half-day of insistence and bullying, New York answered the call.

"Hello! Hello! Grayson & Company? Mr. Grayson? This is Mr. Moorehead, of the Golden Gate Packing Company. The railroad strike is going to make it impossible for us to get our certified check to you at the time stipulated. Have we your permission to tender payment to Mr. Brownlee and take your company's receipt therefor? . . . What? The certified check must be in *your* hands by noon of the seventh? . . . But Mr. Grayson, that is impossible. There will be no trains running. . . . We must live up to our contract? Well, what difference does it make whether we give the money into your hands in New York or into your agent's hands here? . . . You are going to insist on the letter of the contract? . . . And if we fail to deliver the check to you, you insist on taking over our company? . . . If that's your final answer, we'll seek legal advice. I'm sorry we didn't know the type of man you are when we made the contract with you."

The speaker's face had gone white. "We are ruined! Caught in a trap! I should have known better than to have permitted you to place that loan in New York, H. A., instead of with a home concern. California should have been good enough for us!"

"One would think so. But you thought it necessary to send your daughter East to school, instead of to our own institutions."

"And your son went to Harvard!"

The strain of the situation made their conversation petty. . . .

The next morning chaos reigned on the railroads of the country. Giant locomotives which had pulsed with life the day before, now stood where they had been deserted, some on main tracks in front of stations, some in roundhouses.

When the zero hour came, the trains that were in the cities were halted and others were run only far enough to get the crews into town. Desultory attempts were being made by officials and some of the office force to man the trains, but no service of importance was rendered. A stiff-necked International officer had issued his ultimatum: "Sign our scale for another year and give us the working conditions we demand, and we'll run your trains." An equally stiff-necked representative of the Railways Committee had hurled his ultimatum: "Go back to work, and we'll discuss matters." And the public suffered, as it always does. There were threats of military compulsion. But while the militia might guard property, it could not run trains. Public opinion would compel both sides to yield eventually, after a show of resistance, but no such solution was possible for days. Meanwhile fruit-shipments would rot on the tracks, mail-delivery and passenger traffic would be at a standstill. With this knowledge the partners sought legal advice.

"I don't believe the law will permit this confiscation of our business," Locke said.

"If we fight it, I believe these conditions over which we have no control will render the contract-payment void," Moorehead spoke hopefully.

But their legal counsel swept these hopes aside. "It seems to me, gentlemen, that your financial agents wish the Golden Gate Packing Company more than they wish payment of the five hundred thousand dollars." The speaker paused for a moment in deep thought. "It is my opinion that unless the certified check is in the hands of Grayson & Company by twelve noon of the seventh of September, you will have no recourse. Of course, it is not always wise to say that one knows what a court will do. But on the face of things, I should unhesitatingly say that the law will assume that you knew what you were doing when you signed such an agreement, and since you made no provision for strikes and other conditions beyond your control, which conditions should be inserted in every contract, no court will read them into the contract for you."

TWO worn old men sat in the office of the Golden Gate Packing Company.

"H. A., there is nothing we can do. Today is the first."

The door opened, and Sylvia entered.

"Why the gloom? What has happened? Some dreadful distributor cancel an order for a car of our best California peaches?"

Neither of the men appeared to have heard.

"Why, Father—Mr. Locke—what is the trouble?"

"We're ruined; that's all!" her father rasped.

"Ruined? How can you be ruined?" A perplexed look took the place of the smile of the moment before.

"We owe a note in New York. It must be paid in six days, and there are no trains running."

"Can't you telegraph the money, or call up and have the payment postponed? I don't know anything of business, but I'd think that could be done."

"Our certified check must be in New York by noon of the seventh or we forfeit our holdings in this company. My God!" Moorehead's answer was one of utter despair.

"WHY, Father, you have the money to pay it, haven't you? And surely they understand how impossible it is to send mail when there are no trains running! I didn't think anyone could be so heartless!" Sylvia's exclamation found an echo in the hearts of the two men, but it offered no solution.

There were tears in the girl's eyes now. She came over to her father's chair, making no attempt to conceal them. "I'm sorry, Father." Her father put his arm around her and patted her shoulder. Locke's collar was choking him. This was a new Sylvia.

"Father—Mr. Locke—why can't Hal do it?"

The two men looked at her in amazement. They did not know what was coming next. She was on her feet, her face glowing. "Hal *must* carry that certified check to New York for you!"

If an I. W. W. bomb had fallen in their midst, it could not have created greater consternation.

"Impossible!"

"He can't do it!"

The two exclamations shot forth simultaneously.

The girl's face clouded. She absorbed their pessimism, but only for a moment. "It must be done! There is a chance that Hal can do it! Thank God that he is a Driving Fool! It isn't noon yet. That gives

us six days! Hal may be able to accomplish the impossible!"

"**W**HY the funeral, folks?" Hal himself came on the scene.

"We must get that certified check to New York or lose our business." His father's voice was solemn.

"Do you mean to say they are going to hold you to that impossible contract you were discussing the other day?"

"No, they are not going to hold them." Sylvia's voice vibrated with emotion, though her words came slowly and quietly. "You must take the check to New York!"

The boy looked at her vacantly. Then he understood.

"Do you mean it, Dad—Mr. Moorehead? Will you give me the chance to try it?" He was aquiver with the thrill of it.

Moorehead looked like a man reprieved from the electric chair. Then his face fell again. "It is impossible—can't be done. You'll kill yourself if you try to get there on time."

"Son, we can't have you sacrifice yourself for us. We will take our loss and start over. We are business men. What we have done once we can do again." His father spoke decisively.

"Bunk! Both of you! I'm going to live bang up to my reputation!" There was the ghost of a smile lurking around the boyish mouth. "I'm going to go. I'll drive hard and carefully—and I'll get there. If you don't let me take your old certified check, I'll drive it anyhow, just to show you I can!"

"Bring the check, and come home with Mr. Locke, Father!" Sylvia was issuing orders as she rushed out the door behind Hal.

When the fathers reached the Locke home, they found Hal in overalls, working on his car. Sylvia sat on a greasy box, absorbed in the task at hand. The yellow roadster looked a speed-car in its every line and fitting. Shock-absorbers, taped steering wheel, two extra wire wheels, an extra leaf in each spring, all the impedimenta were there. His audience watched the boy go over the grease-cups, fill the oil-reservoir, fasten two extra gallons of oil on the running-board, slip a hatchet into the scabbard next the oil-cans, securely fasten the canvas sack containing the tire-chains on the running board, throw in a desert water-bag to carry water in emer-

gencies, test the battery and make the car shipshape generally. So thoroughly conditioned had the yellow roadster been kept that what would have been a day's work for the average car was a matter of only a deft touch here and there.

Then two young heads bent over a road-map. "Off the ferry at Oakland, out Broadway, over the Tunnel Road to Martinez, ferry to Benicia—I hope I don't lose much time in this ferrying business—on through Fairfield, Susun, Dixon, Davis and over the Causeway into Sacramento. Don't think I shall go through Reno. Better go to Placerville from Sacramento, and on to Carson. Cut through to Fallon, Austin and up through Elko to Ogden and hit the Lincoln Highway again at Evanston, Wyoming. I know that route better, even if it is a little farther. On through Laramie, Cheyenne, Omaha, Marshalltown, Cedar Rapids, Clinton, Aurora, Joliet, South Bend, Lima, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and into New York. If only I could travel as fast as my finger on this map!" Hal sighed.

THERE was nothing in the make-up of the yellow roadster as it threaded its way from St. Francis Wood, along Portola Drive, into Ocean Avenue out Mission and across Eleventh into Market and down that broad artery of travel on to the Oakland ferry which might have indicated that its driver was bound for the other side of the continent, for it looked very much as it always did.

Hal chafed at the time spent on the ferry. Once off the boat, Sylvia and Hal in the roadster motioned for the two fathers to follow, as they wended their way out Broadway. Outside of Oakland the cars stopped.

"Take care of yourself." Hal's father tried not to choke on the lump in his throat.

"Now, my boy, your life is more important than that check—remember that," Moorehead spoke solemnly.

"Remember, Hal, don't lose a minute. Only—only—maybe you will find time to wire us once or twice. And when you get to New York, send us a million words by wire. And do be careful! And you know I want you to hurry back." A tear coursed down a peach-blow cheek. Then a companion tear rolled down the other cheek.

Hal shook hands with the two men without a word, kissed the girl passionately

good-by—and the three were still standing as he left them when he looked back and waved to them a moment later. They watched him until he faded into the landscape. Then they drove home silently, the men to sit moodily and smoke, the girl to go to her room and have a good cry.

FAR, far out the paved highway toward Martinez the yellow roadster flew. Its driver felt in his breast pocket to be sure the precious package was there, and to button securely the flap which held the package safely. The roar of his eight-cylinder motor rose and fell as he now depressed his foot, now raised it slightly. He was going to save his father's business, and Sylvia's father's business. He was putting to good account his ability to get over the road fast. He *must* get through! What if something should happen? If he should slip off a bridge? Get stuck in the desert sand? If that stretch beyond Salt Wells should happen to be wet! His father, good old Dad! Had he been fair with him? Had he always tried to please him? And Sylvia, maybe her father was right about his marrying her. Maybe he should quit his fast driving.

The wind sang past. He inhaled deeply. This was life! His nervousness had vanished. He felt he could drive on forever. Sylvia! She knew he could do it. "Get there, my Driving Fool!" Those were the last words she had said to him. And her voice had trembled as she said it.

"**B**ACK again, Mister?" Hal looked up as he stopped at the filling station in Carson City to see that selfsame advice giver of a few weeks back.

"Fill her up," was his only comment. He looked at his watch—he had made Carson City in seven hours and twenty-five minutes. He was driving too fast. Too hard on the car for such a long grind as lay before him.

"Roads good to Fallon?"

"Don't know. Better go on up to Reno."

Disdaining an answer to this advice, Hal pressed on; his speedometer showed three hundred nineteen miles at Fallon, and he found that he had maintained an average of over thirty-one miles an hour. He resolved to keep up his speed so long as he could and not damage his car. Every mile covered meant a mile nearer New York—and home—and Sylvia. The Fallon garage

man gave him some information when he found he was determined to go ahead.

"Been raining out there. You'll get through if you got to go tonight, but you'd be a lot safer doing it in the daytime. Stranger in these parts?"

"I've been over the road several times."

"Well, you're all right, then. Road may be soft, but if you're not a stranger, you know enough to keep in the ruts and not try to get out to the side where it *looks* a lot better, but where you'll just about sink out of sight. Going to start digging out an Eastern car tomorrow morning."

The garage man was giving him excellent advice, and Hal knew it. The only safe way in the alkali country is to stick to the beaten path, even if it is water-filled and the ground alongside looks much better.

Fighting the mud, the eastward traveler managed to reach Salt Wells, sixteen miles away, without serious trouble. The night driving was cool, and a better energy-conserver than the days, and Hal had not yet begun to feel fatigue. He resolved to push on to Ogden.

IF anyone should tell the tourist that a fool driver had made Ogden from San Francisco in thirty-four hours, the tourist would not believe it—probably say the time was three days and four hours, which would be nearer right, according to his way of driving. But thirty-four hours out of the city by the Golden Gate the yellow roadster rolled into the streets of the Utah city. It had meant hitting rough roads hard; it had meant punishing tires over the stone-hard alkali ruts of the desert country. It had meant clinging to the steering-wheel until it seemed that it would be impossible to do so for another minute.

TWO hours after bidding Hal good-by, Sylvia sprang to the telephone. Fear tore at her heart.

"Mr. Brownlee wishes to speak to you, Father." She gave a sigh of relief. It was not Hal in trouble after all; he was still driving on.

"Hello, Brownlee! . . . Yes . . . Hal is taking the check to New York. . . . Yes, of course. . . . Yes, in his car. . . . What's that? . . . Well, the boy would go. And we're praying for his success. We—"

Had Sylvia's father been able to see along the wire, he would have beheld an

agitated listener at the other end. As it was, he heard only a thud as the receiver dropped from the nerveless fingers of the man at the other end. But his mind was on a yellow car and a young driver, and Moorehead hung up without being aware that Brownlee had broken off the conversation.

"Father, you shouldn't have told Mr. Brownlee that Hal had gone! I don't trust that man, and it can do no good to have him or anyone else know that Hal has that check. You know Brownlee is Grayson's man, and I think he is no better than old Grayson himself."

"Nonsense, daughter. Why should you believe that Mr. Brownlee is not fair? He has been extremely courteous during his stay with us."

"I don't care. I don't like him, and I never did. He doesn't like Hal, either. I'm sure he doesn't."

"Oh, well, perhaps he doesn't like Hal because you like him. That's natural."

BBROWNLEE was nothing if not efficient. He thought the delivery of the check had been made impossible by the railroad strike. He had not counted on what had happened. He slumped down into a chair to think. It would not do to wire ahead and have the messenger stopped. He could not use the telephone for the purpose, either. That might be equally bad in its after-effects, for if the Packing Company were able to prove interference with the messenger, the courts would undoubtedly rule in favor of the Packing Company. No; he must stop the boy in some way that could not possibly direct suspicion where it belonged.

Shortly afterward a well-dressed man appeared at a Van Ness Avenue automobile salesroom and purchased a big touring car. Then he drove to a place where cars are to be rented by the day or week. After some conversation with the manager, he walked out with two hard-looking young men. They all got into the car he had just purchased.

"A young man left for New York about three hours ago in a yellow roadster, California license No. 238-180. For reasons of my own, I don't wish this young man to get to New York until after twelve o'clock noon of the seventh. Today is the first."

"Well, don't worry, boss. He wont. It can't be drove that fast—not by one man."

"Wait a minute," the boss interrupted. "This driver may get there. If anyone can, he can."

"Well, count me out if you want him killed. I'll do anything else, but not that. I don't quite make my money that way." One of the men made a move to leave the car.

"Wait a minute." His employer lighted a fresh cigarette. "I don't wish him killed. In fact, it is highly important that he be not injured. I want him delayed—that's all."

"What's all this about? I got to know what I'm hired for and all about it." The second of the two toughs was not entirely convinced that he wished the job, either.

"Well, on the quiet, this young man—you know who he is, the Drivin' Fool—bet me five thousand dollars that he could be in New York by noon of the seventh. I bet him he couldn't. If he gets there, he must report to me by wire. Now, if you could—ah—*delay* him and not have it known why you did so, I win—and so do you. But if you bungle the job, you lose. If I become mixed up in it in any way, you lose. Want the job?"

"What's in it for us?"

"Five thousand dollars if he doesn't get there. You see, I'll give you all I win."

"Do we walk after him?"

"No; you take this car."

"Don't kid us, Mister; we both got weak hearts."

"I'm not kidding you."

"Where does our pay come in?"

"TAKE this car and five hundred dollars.

When you come back, you get the car, which cost me three thousand dollars, and fifteen hundred cash, if you have been successful. I'm trusting you more than you are trusting me."

"How do you know we wont crook you and run off with the car?"

"Why,"—and there was a glint of steel in the eyes of the speaker,—"*it* wont pay you to do it. How many times have you been over the route?" The change of tone was abrupt.

"Drove all last summer between Detroit and here, delivering cars from the factory. Guess we'll know the road as well as the man we are after."

"Two of you should be able to catch one fool."

"We'll git him. We can drive harder than he can."

WITHIN an hour they too were crossing the ferry bound for Oakland. They guessed that Hal would go by way of Martinez, instead of Stockton, as he might have done if he had wished to throw them off the scent temporarily. Inquiry revealed they were right. Arriving at Sacramento, further inquiry showed that for some reason their quarry had not taken the high Sierra route through Truckee and Reno, but had turned off and gone through Placerville. The yellow car had left a trail anyone might follow.

"A friend of ours went through here in a yellow roadster. Did you see him?" The pursuit had reach Elko, Nevada.

"Nice boy in that yellow car." The marshal spat copiously. "Come through here early this morning and asks about the road to Ogden. Gives me five dollars when I told him it was pretty rotten. Said he come through from the coast since yesterday noon. Guess he was tryin' to bunk me."

"The only way we're goin' to git this *hombre* is to drive while he sleeps. And he aint slept yet; that's a cinch." The pursuers were beginning to believe they were going to earn their money.

THE thirty-four-hour drive was beginning to demand its toll. The driver of the yellow roadster climbed wearily out of his car for a bite to eat at the Rock Haven restaurant in Ogden. He went to sleep while the waiter was making the roundtrip to the kitchen. In five minutes he had eaten and was on his way. He had resolved to put as much distance as possible between himself and home before he slept. His goal was a thousand miles, and he had come eight hundred fifty. But his body rebelled. He nodded as he drove out of Ogden. Finding himself at a disadvantage, he stopped and bathed his face in a mountain stream. This wakened him temporarily. His eyes ached. Ruts and bumps which would not have been noticed the day before registered on his aching shoulders. His nerves were jumping. His brain was giving notice that it had reached its limit. Finally there was a peremptory knock on his mental door. . . . He awoke with a start and looked at his watch. He had come to a stop alongside the road and had been dead asleep. He drove his car to one side of the road into a clump of cottonwoods beside a little stream. Then he dropped to sleep instantly.

When he awoke, his watch told him that he had been asleep almost four hours. He was shivering with the cold. The sun was just coming up. He gave the grease-cups a twist all round, dumped some oil into the car, inspected his tires and was on his way. Each move of the steering-wheel caused him excruciating pain. Each jolt of the car racked him. He was stiff in every joint. At times he felt as though he were being torn to pieces by inches. But gradually the feeling wore off.

SYLVIA'S father stopped in his pacing back and forth. "Any word from Hal?" "Not a single word, Father. But I know he is all right. He's too busy to send word. I know he'll get there on time."

"Well, here it is Monday noon, and we haven't heard a word. How do you know what's become of him? I'm sorry we let him go. It's dangerous; his life is worth more than that. I am afraid I was a little harsh with him when you were involved. I don't see how he will ever make it!"

"Father!" She drew him to her and kissed him. "I know Hal will make it. I know he will!" She spoke bravely, but—why had he not wired or phoned? An inspiration came to her. She reached for the phone and called the Auto Club. She got the name of a garage in Elko. An hour later she had the garage on the wire. Yes, a yellow roadster went through the other day. How long ago? Oh, about eight o'clock Sunday morning. Yes, yes, the garage man was sure it was a young man driving, and the license was a California one.

Tuesday morning dawned. The telephone bell in the Moorehead house jangled. The jangle was echoed by Sylvia's nerves. Her father rushed for the phone, but the girl was there first.

"Hello, Randolph 3235. Miss Sylvia Moorehead?"

"Yes, yes, this is Miss Moorehead speaking."

"Laramie, Wyoming, calling you."

"Yes, hurry, I am ready, Laramie."

A woman's voice: "Is this Sylvia Moorehead?"

"Yes. Do please hurry and tell me!"

"I was told to tell you—" There was a break in the connection. Then an interminable wait of five minutes.

"Hello, Miss Moorehead?"

"Yes, I hear you perfectly. Hurry. What has happened?"

"I was told to tell you that Hal Locke passed through here at nine-thirty Monday night."

"Father, Father, Hal went through Laramie Monday night at nine-thirty—and the map says Laramie is nearly fourteen hundred miles away!"

"Yes, and it is Tuesday now. Where would he be right now?"

"Some place in Nebraska," his daughter answered as they both looked at the map. "Father, I just know he is going to get there!"

LUCKILY for Sylvia, she could not know all that had happened since Hal had gone through Laramie.

After his sleep in the early hours of Monday morning, Hal had ridden on. He had made the mistake of going too long without sleep, and thenceforth decided to sleep a little each twenty-four hours. Beyond Laramie he reached a likely-looking spot and brought his car to a stop at the side of the road. He decided to rest an hour. He was awake almost to the minute, so perfectly was his body attuned to his mental processes. But the temptation to sleep just a little longer was strong. He would just close his eyes for a *minute*.

And as he slept, a big black touring car came out of the west. The roadster was plainly visible. The touring car slid almost noiselessly by the sleeper. He stirred uneasily but did not awake. The touring car turned a quarter-mile beyond, purred softly back and stopped. Two shadowy figures stole back from it and approached the standing car. They scanned the license plate. Then one of the men opened a huge clasp knife and wet the blade by drawing it through his mouth. Clearly, he knew that a wet knife cuts rubber much easier than a dry knife. He cut a jagged hole in the two rear tires and held the blade in them so that the air would escape slowly and with no noise. Having done this, he went to the front of the car, where the two spare mounted wheels were carried.

The sleeper, as if aware of an alien presence, stirred. Instantly the two intruders went flat on the ground and blended with the shadows. There was no further movement from the car, and they started up again. Again the sleeper moved. But he soon was quiet. The two spare wheels were removed, the thieves rolling them over to their own car. Then they

climbed in, turned and slid in and away in the gloom. After riding several miles, they swung wide out into the sagebrush and dropped the wheels into a wash.

THE sleeper awoke and sat bolt upright. There was something wrong! He sensed it. He had overslept. Stepping on the starter, he threw the car into low and eased his clutch in. Long experience had taught him the drag of flat tires, and he stopped the car, got out and went around to the rear. A glance showed him the trouble, and another swift survey of the running board showed him what had happened there. Some one had crippled him, either in the belief that he was some one else or—the suspicion hit him with powerful force—with the intent of crippling him because they knew who he was. He wasted no time in inward vituperation. Pulling a jack from his tool kit, he removed the two wheels, his only illumination being the fifteen-foot length of cord on his trouble-light, which he had attached to one of his lamps on the dash. The inner tubes had to be patched and the outer casing strengthened enough to prevent the inner tube blowing out through the aperture made by the vandals. He searched for something in his tool kit to use as a boot inside the casing, but could find nothing. Putting some instantaneous patches on his inner tubes, he searched again and found a piece of radiator hose, and by splitting this managed to place a thin layer of it in each tire. After which he pumped the tires up with his engine pump.

The repairs had taken him two hours. And he had not gone ten miles until he felt a drag on one of the wheels which told him that at least one of his repairs had failed. Deciding not to attempt another temporary repair, he drove along at fifteen miles an hour, risking damage to his differential gears, where the road would have been good for forty miles an hour. There was an all-night garage in Cheyenne. Hal's wheels were standard size, and he found tires easy to get. But wheels were another matter. The only ones obtainable were on the car of the garage-owner. The attendant would not listen to an offer of twice their value. The boss would be down about eight o'clock, and the stranger might talk to him then. It was not yet three!

The stranger bristled at this information. "You drive me to the boss' house!" he commanded. Arrived there, he knocked

on the front door. The house was pitch dark. Finally there was a movement within and a deep voice said: "What'n hell do you want, out there?"

"I'm on my way to New York. Some one stole my two spare wheels. I can use yours if you will only sell them to me. I need them badly and can't wait. The price isn't important."

By this time the owner was down at the front door in his nightshirt. His appearance was not prepossessing. Hal's heart sank.

"You take those wheels, son, and I'll order some more. I can get them from Denver in a day if I phone for 'em. I'm not in the business of holding tourists up. You just give me fifty-five dollars for the two wheels, and we'll call it square. I guess I can tell you're all right."

"No, I'll leave a hundred, and if there is any change you may send it to me, if you insist. Guess if you just address it 'Hal Locke, San Francisco,' it'll reach me, or if you wish to make sure, just address it Traffic Department, Police Chief; I'm well acquainted there."

"All right, all right, have it your own way. Just pass the favor along to the next man that needs it. That's a good way to get along in the world, I find." The night-shirted figure faded back into the gloom of the house.

THE feeling of gratitude that welled in Hal's heart almost made him forget the cause of his asking for the wheels. While the boy was changing the tires over to the garage owner's wheels, Hal did some figuring. It was Tuesday morning. He still had approximately nineteen hundred miles to go by noon of Friday. He knew that he had shot his best bolt physically, and that he must of necessity drive slower and slower as he approached his goal. If he slept at all from now on, it would be at the risk of failing in his task. He had already spent too much time in sleeping and making repairs. He would have little time for either from now on. By the time he was ready to go, it was daylight. He had lost more valuable time. Once away from the garage, he opened his throttle as far as the roads would stand. Nebraska roads—when he reached them—he knew would stand almost any speed if it had not rained. And if it had rained—well, it just must not have rained. If it had, he knew he was beaten.

With the yellow car entering Sidney, Nebraska, the spirits of its driver once more revived. Could he endure the more than three days without sleep? He did not know. He must draw on his will-power. His foot pressed the accelerator. Now, absent-mindedness is not a quality of which to be proud. Hal came out of his dream with a start. There was a gray-coated motorcycle cop floating alongside his car, and his hand at right angles told all too plainly what he was there for. Hal took a chance—he crowded his accelerator until it hit the floor. The cop twisted his hand-grip, which is the motorcycle equivalent for pushing the accelerator to the floor. Hal's speedometer needle traveled to "55," then "60." It vacillated for a moment and then crept on to "65." And still the motorcycle roared alongside. Nebraska's dirt roads are wonderful. The needle slid to "70." The cop hung on. Hal could see him out of the corner of his eye. It wasn't the fine that was worrying the speeder, but he was determined that he would not stop and run the risk of a half-day in jail while the court was deciding what to do with him personally or was trying to round up a jury to give him a regular trial. But Fate, in the shape of a road-barrier, intervened, and there was nothing to do but stop. The cop rolled alongside.

"What do you think Nebraska is—a speedway? Seventy miles an hour is too much. You—"

There was something about the voice that sounded memory's well. Where had Hal heard it? Meanwhile the cop was removing his dust-covered goggles preparatory to reaching into his pocket for the arrest-slip. As the goggles came off Hal knew.

"Why, you low-down top sergeant, you got lots of guts stopping a second lieutenant in this high-handed manner!"

THE speed-cop's head snapped up, and his face was a study for a moment, before it broke into a smile. "You ornery little shavetail, I'm not in the army now. I'll give you ten days in the hoosegow. Where you going, anyway? Haven't seen you since we used to have those little coming-out parties on the Germans in the Argonne." He held out a paw that bespoke years of toil amidst Nebraska's staple crop. He got his information in two minutes.

"Boy, if you get to New York by Fri-

day noon, it will only be because I got you across Nebraska so fast that your shadow will be an hour behind us. My district ends at the next town. I'll put one of the other boys on my job there. You know the top sergeants did all the work in the war, and I guess I've still got to show second loots how to do it. I'll flash my uniform, and we'll tear 'em wide open. Then I'll come back and explain. We'll help anybody in Nebraska if they have a good reason for being helped."

The sergeant knew Nebraska roads like a book. He settled down to save time, talking a blue streak as they whirled along.

"Give that car ahead of you the horn, so he'll get over a bit. Let's pass him."

The sergeant was speaking of a black touring-car which seemed intent only on keeping far enough ahead to make the yellow car eat dust or drop back. If the occupants of the car ahead heard the signal, they made no move to get over. Hal decided to drive alongside and gradually force the other car over far enough to pass. The occupants of the car seemed to understand what was wanted. Their car edged over, and Hal increased his speed, confident that he could get by. Just as he was drawing abreast the car ahead swerved sharply to the left. There was only one thing for Hal to do. The swerve had brought the two cars so close that a crash was imminent. Hal put his outside wheels into the ditch, and the moment he got into soft going, the black car picked up speed and forged ahead. It was miles before the two ex-war buddies came in sight of the car again. At the signal to make room, the driver looked around. Even through the dust he saw the automatic in the hand of Sergeant Havens pointed at him. The next instant the roadway was clear, and the yellow car thundered by. The little drama had taken only a few seconds to enact. The sergeant motioned Hal to slow down. The black car came up, and the driver stopped at the implied command of the automatic.

"The next time you pull anything like you did back there, you're going to get drilled between the shoulders. I don't know what your idea is, but don't try to put it over again. If you do, you'll finish the trip in a pine box."

"Them's pretty high words, Mister, to men that's 'tendin' to their own business. And you aint scarin' us none, either. We got as much right to the road as you have."

"Well, don't take your half out of the

middle any more, or hell will be poppin'." And Havens signaled Hal to go ahead.

LODGE POLE, Chappell, Big Springs, Brule, all flew by in kaleidoscopic order. *It had not rained in Nebraska!* Rolling into North Platte, Havens looked at his watch and remarked: "Well, here's where you change time again."

His companion pulled out his watch, and Havens looked over at it. "Hell's kitchen! You running by that watch? You'll get into New York three hours too late if you're not careful. Don't you know that it is three hours later in New York than it is in San Francisco?"

"Kill me for a Heinie, Sergeant, if that's not just what I am doing! I've got three hours less than I thought I had. We've sure got to burn these fine Nebraska roads or I don't make it; that's all!"

It was long past midnight when they entered Omaha. They had Farnam Street almost to themselves as they stopped at the curb.

"Now, Lieutenant, you have over fourteen hundred miles to go. Get a good meal here. Run over there to that restaurant and eat. Bring me a sandwich. Got a wire or two you want sent?"

"Just one to Sylvia Moorehead, St. Francis Wood, San Francisco: 'Omaha 4 A. M., Wednesday. Things O. K.'"
Havens dutifully wrote the message down on an arrest slip. When Hal returned to the car, Havens ate his sandwich, then he said: "You curl up here in this seat and sleep an hour or so. I don't care whether you have time to do it or not. It'll make time for you in the end. I'll watch and get you up on time." Before the sentence was finished Hal had made himself comfortable in the seat and wrapped his blanket around him, glad of the chance to rest, but fearful to make the suggestion himself.

It seemed to Hal that he had scarcely gone to sleep, when he was aroused by the rough shaking Havens was giving him. "You go it alone, old scout, from here, and over the top with the best of luck to you." They shook hands warmly and with a "See you again," Hal turned his car toward the bridge that would take him into Council Bluffs.

IN Iowa the black touring-car again made its appearance. If Hal left a town, it was always just ahead of him or just be-

hind him. It was getting on his nerves. He had had several narrow escapes as the result of the apparent stupidity of its driver, but the suspicion that the driver was in reality a very good one had resolved itself into a settled fact in the mind of Hal. The mysterious car was again directly ahead. Hal's horn asked for the right-of-way. For a wonder it was granted. Perhaps it was the memory of the automatic, perhaps some new deviltry. Be that as it may, the yellow car had plenty of room. The country was low. The water at the sides of the road had formed a soggy mass. The demon of revenge suddenly possessed the driver of the yellow car. He swung his car to the right and held it there until he had run the black peril into the morass. It did not turn over, but the last thing the eastward-bound driver saw as he sped onward was his enemy in the muck up to its belly, with the prospect of waiting several hours before some one came along with a tow rope to pull it out. If they had been sent out to stop delivery of the check, they had not succeeded thus far, and "They shall not pass" thence forward became their intended victim's battle-cry.

THE clouds looked threatening as the roadster sped through Illinois and Indiana. Skirting Chicago, the way led across Indiana, through South Bend and Fort Wayne, into Ohio.

To the man at the wheel it seemed as though the journey would never end. Hour merged into hour, and still he pressed on. It was only by the greatest mental effort that he could remain awake. Hallucinations came to plague him. At night he saw sumptuous hotels, with their windows gleaming an invitation to stop. He distinctly saw his own home, brilliantly lighted, beckoning to him. Yet as he drew near, it melted into nothingness. He saw a circus parade, and noted clearly the scarlet and gold trappings on the elephants, the mahouts swinging their ponderous charges this way and that with their sharp hooks. He passed a boy, his bicycle beside him, asleep in a fence corner. And there was Jerry, the traffic man, holding out his arm to bar the way. He knew they were all visions; it was only his brain protesting at being driven so hard. A chill came over him. Would the terrific strain never end? Were there really any beds in which to sleep, beds with nice, clean white sheets, where one could luxuriate in undisturbed

slumber? He doubted it. It seemed an age since he had bidden Sylvia good-by; yet it had not been a week. Then came the memory of his mission, and he braced himself for the task ahead.

As he passed through the mountains of Pennsylvania he stopped frequently and bathed his face. He had to watch himself more closely than ever now. His most dangerous period of sleepiness came just at dawn, and in the evening when day was merging into night. A moment's sleep at the wheel in the fog that often shut him in would mean death if he should happen to miss the road. At times the visibility was so poor that he could scarcely see beyond his radiator.

Friday morning dawned. He was speeding out Broad Street, Philadelphia, on the last leg of his journey, for New York was only a hundred miles away. As he drew nearer to the end of his journey, he redoubled his caution, lest an accident should cause him to fail with victory near. His nerves were raw. He caught himself starting at the least intimation of a clash with another car.

The wild-looking driver in the mud-spattered yellow roadster went dead asleep as he sat in his car on the Forty-second Street ferry, but awoke instantly when the boat came into the slip. He looked at his watch, it said eleven-thirty—thirty minutes to get to Grayson's office. Had Hal been a native New Yorker, he might have selected a quicker route into New York and down to Grayson's office. Dropping into the traffic, the mud-covered car soon became hopelessly entangled. Finally it turned off Forty-second into Broadway. Grayson & Company was far downtown, at the edge of the financial district. The traffic waits seemed interminable. He would never get there. His watch told him that he was losing the race. He must speed up. He had not come thus far to fail on the threshold of success.

THE ride of a maniac in a mud-incrusted yellow roadster the last mile to Grayson & Company's offices will live long in the hearts and memory of those that saw it. It has been said that New Yorkers are a race apart, that they are *blasé* in the full sense of that much-riden word, that nothing makes their lower maxillary sag from their upper ditto, that the word *thrill* is absolutely not in their lexicon. All such foolish observations went by the board

that day. Mouths flew open; pedestrians jumped for the curb; even taxi drivers put on brakes as they recognized a master dodger come slipping, scraping, sliding, darting in and out, this way and that. Cross-traffic opened up as if by magic to let the maniac by. Traffic men were powerless to stop the yellow cyclone; reduced speed simply did not exist for its driver.

But when the first gasp of amazement had passed, New York's well-oiled traffic machinery got in motion.

Hal applied his brakes and was on the sidewalk before his car stopped rolling. He was dust from head to foot. His face was Indian-red in its swarthinness. He walked with a rolling motion, as though he had just come off the high seas.

"Officer," he said, as he stopped before a bluecoat, "I have a package to deliver to Grayson & Company. Will you be a witness to the fact that I delivered it before twelve o'clock?"

"Sure, I will, sir—that is, if you deliver it before twelve. It is four minutes to twelve now."

WAS Mr. Grayson in? He was, but he could not see anyone. Yes, his office was straight down the aisle and around to the right.

"I must see him at once."

"Have a chair, sir. And whom shall I tell Mr. Grayson it is, sir?"

The wild-looking stranger thrust his questioner aside, tore the office gate off its hinges by the fierceness of his rush, sent two anemic clerks flying back to their desks with well-directed shoves, ducked a vicious swing from another, and by this time he was bursting into the presence of Grayson himself.

Close behind him came the officer, his face wreathed in smiles, for he had enjoyed the performance immensely.

"Locke is my name. I am delivering to you a certified check for five hundred thousand dollars, and I will thank you for a receipt for the Golden Gate Packing Company." The speaker swayed and then recovered his poise.

Grayson paled. He looked as though he were seeing a ghost. "The Golden Gate Packing Company! How could you get here?"

"Automobile!" The speaker dropped into a chair. "Officer, please get his receipt if I go to sleep." The air was stifling.

The reaction was coming, and Hal's head dropped forward. He was dead asleep.

"When—when did you leave San Francisco?" There was no response to this question. Grayson shook him sharply. "When did you leave San Francisco?"

"Last Saturday noon."

"Sure, the man's ~~crazy~~, Mr. Grayson. He couldn't do that thing." The officer looked incredulous.

"I wish he were," Grayson remarked inwardly. Aloud: "Jackson, get Mr. Locke a receipt for this check. And I congratulate you on your drive, Mr. Locke. On the whole, perhaps there was a misunderstanding."

"There can't be any now, at any rate," was all the answer he received.

"YOU'LL come with us," was the greeting Hal got from the traffic man around his car when he came down from Grayson's office with the precious receipt. He said not a word at being bundled into his own car alongside an officer and being ordered to drive to the station house.

Eager newspaper men, drawn to the station-house by the chance for a first-page thriller, crowded around when the culprit arrived. Pencils were out, ready to record verbatim, the tale of the yellow car. Reporters were already at Grayson's office to pick up the threads there. Now the driver would unburden himself and spin a wild yarn.

"Officer, will you do me a big favor?" the culprit asked. "Will you let me send a pair of wires before I do anything else?"

Ah, the newspaper men already were writing the drama.

"Go ahead," was the curt reply, accompanied by a motion to a desk near by.

"Beat old Grayson by an eyebrow, Little Old Peaches and Cream. Going to sleep seven hundred hours." It was addressed to Sylvia Moorehead, St. Francis Wood, San Francisco.

The second wire read: "Had enough fast going to last me a lifetime. Order the license and tune up the wedding bells." It was addressed to Sylvia's father.

"Now, officer, do your duty." It was the same whimsical boy. "Lock me up so I can sleep, will you? And let me explain tomorrow? And, oh, yes, don't wake and call me early, wont you, Officer, dear?"

"Well, I'll be damned!" muttered the person to whom these remarks were addressed.



The Place of Hisses

Black Buck is beset by a horde of migrating wild pigs, and his strangely developed intelligence is put to a severe test.

By CHARLES ALEXANDER

LOSE by the cabin was a glade from which came a soft plucking sound and movement of hoofs. A doe was feeding. Her spotted fawn rubbed against her sides and succeeded in pushing her hindquarters so that she must take two sidewise steps to retain her balance. The doe did not mind in the least. Her nerves were not undone by such capriciousness. It did not appear even to come to her notice. But she pranced across the glade to nibble some salmonberry suckers, brushing incontinently over her fawn quite as if he were not dearer than life to her.

This taste of his own medicine aroused no rancor in the fawn. It did not tauten his nerves. Such was the amazing stupidity of both doe and fawn that their nerves could become excited and alarmed only when there existed cause for alarm.

A pileated woodpecker, larger than a crow, sank a hole at the two-hundred-foot level in a straight cedar snag. He failed to find what he was seeking, and

in his ridiculous philosophy this did not even make him discontented. He slept awhile in the lazy midsummer sun, and then tried again at a new level.

He knew that a sharp-shin floated as a tiny speck above him, but as long as the sharp-shin was only a speck in the sky, he was not, to the foolish woodpecker, a sharp-shin. He did not become a winged dealer of death until he got within dealing distance.

The two big brown brush-rabbits thumping and nibbling in the old clearing before the cabin knew of the sharp-shin; and further, they knew that Black Buck, dog master of the Yachats country, dozed within the cabin. Having no imaginations, the rabbits were quite happy, and the whites of their eyes did not show.

Had the three pack-rats on top of Black Buck's cabin been blessed with what is known as intelligence, they would have deserved poems and medals for their splendid defiance of fate. All day they

had played pack-rat golf on the roof of the king's castle, and every breath they drew told them that the king was at home. The king was a flesh-eater, and the pack-rats were flesh, which knowledge alone should have worried them unto death. Yet, strangely, it did not. The king was not hungry, and when he was, his menu would be his own affair.

BLACK BUCK, however, knew without thinking about them, of the pack-rats and the rabbits, the woodpecker and the deer. But he was full, and did not think of them as food. The noise of the pack-rats did not even disturb his dozing. He knew what they were doing on his roof; like people who had never grown up, they were addicted to being happy. The *rat-a-tat-tat* of the young acorns they were rolling reëchoed in the shanty. One of the rats would carry an acorn to the ridgepole, set it rolling down the roof, romp after it and catch it just before it fell from the eaves. He would carry it back to the ridgepole, and in his turn repeat the process.

In this childish game there was neither sense nor object. It did the pack-rats no definable good. It did not swell their larder, nor were the walls of their nests thickened by it. Yet all the drowsy humdrum afternoon—when, at any moment the hawk might strike—the pack-rats soberly played it.

Buck's land was fat. He squatted in the doorway and blinked at the setting sun. The surf on the distant beach was low and soft. Such restfulness was in itself disturbing. Buck had mastered the region by a series of struggles. There had never been a time when at least one knotty problem did not confront him. Now Buck's country was at peace, and peace galled him.

In this door where Buck stood, half-blind with satiety, he had met his first enemy—a man. Buck had been a black, frowsy pup, inexperienced in all laws save that of man-love. He had loved his master, who dwelt in the cabin. And he had tried to sink his puppy fangs in the enemy who had killed his master. He had been left in the clearing with a bullet-hole through his head.

Only his nose had been killed. The delicate nerve-ganglia that analyzed the air he breathed, telling him the secrets of far places, would no longer function. He

must shoulder his own way in the world, and his sense of smell, by which his breed has always shouldered its way, was gone. He could have been expected to die. It would have been predicted he would die. Dying, he might have felt fully justified.

But there only died in him his dependence on the sense of smell. The other senses, shrunken in his kind by long ages of dependence on the sense of smell, stirred and awoke. Necessity begot intelligence. When he found no meat, he let the cougar's nose work for him, appropriating the meat that the cougar trailed down. When his wolf-pack blindly followed their noses on a hot trail, Buck, no longer slave to one sense, learned to calculate and to head off the quarry. Men had set their shrewdness against Buck's, and he had outmatched them, play by play.

NEVER, in all the years that all the wilderness dwellers had served Buck's purposes, had such a season of fat obtained. Vegetation, the support of all life, was above normal. Procreation ran riot. From swales and mountains arose a song of fatness.

The sharp-shin soared lazily and did not strike; the pack-rats played with their acorns instead of eating them; Black Buck trotted from the old shanty and leaped neither to right nor to left as the rabbits scattered before him. The land was fat and sleepy—sleepy, fat and ripe for disaster.

To kill had become easy and therefore unattractive. Buck saw many animals, but he did not attack. During the early night his muscles carried him on and on. Life was rife, full-fed and peaceful. Buck had no object in his travel, save to appease the gnawing dissatisfaction within him.

He went up into Criminal Gulch, the ravine which connected the coast country with the outer world. Through it Buck had first come as a pup. Hunters, trappers and strange adventurers all came into the Yachats through the Gulch. It was quiet as Buck entered it.

In a cabin in the fern-flats beyond it a half-breed Indian sat far into the night. Like the pack-rats, he played an idle game. Like them, too, he played with food, betting his flour and venison with himself on the turn of the cards. The Indian, likewise, was fat and peaceful.

With the winter there would be much fur. . . . He would bet his pony on the next game.

He came to his feet; his skin crawled; the cards scattered on the floor. Only once in its life does a horse scream. . . .

From his door he could dimly see his little corral. Its surface was in motion, as if a gray flood had burst down the gulch. And a gray flood—a knee-deep flood of bristling, undulating little backs, mass upon mass—had poured like a torrent of destroying invaders out of the south into the fat and peaceful coast country.

Unbarring his door in the morning, the half-breed walked slowly to the area where his green pasture had been. His fences were flat. A few crunched bones remained of his horse. And there was a swath through the thickets in the gulch as if an army had poured through.

AS on the day before, Black Buck dozed in his cabin. And this day, as before, a song arose from all the land. But it was a whispered song, a song of rustlings and furtive noises, which the leaves of the vine-maples took up and carried to the chinquapins; and which the chinquapins in turn whispered to the spruces, which told it over with many moans. No hawk slept on the wing; no rabbits fed in the clearing; the doe and fawn were hidder; the pack-rats came not to the rattling roof above the king.

And the sleep of Black Buck was not the sleep of the days of peace and plenty. Often his lips writhed, and at these times he opened his eyes without seeing the cabin. Before dozing again he would lick his many wounds—rips and gashes covering every part of his glossy black frame.

THE great *javelina* migration west and north from the Arizona desert is fully recorded (in the annals of the forest), but the impulse behind the mysterious movement of these little wild pigs was not and has never been explained. Life has ever drifted. The history of life, in each of its million forms, is a history of drifting—aimless, without reason or purpose, and often with disaster to the creatures blindly obeying a call they could not resist. The javelins or peccaries, left their chosen land and ran, as if their day had come, west and north, west and north.

Belike the destination of the peccaries

was some ancient land, long since reduced to flux and muted into modern forms. Whatever destroyed country of their sires the wild pigs sought in the west and north, nothing stopped them until they faced the arrogant Pacific. As fleeing ghosts they were seen in the Inland Empire, in the Sierras, and at length in the Coast Range. Always they ran, heedless, and untempted by rich valleys. Once, at night, they swept through the streets of a city, destroying dogs and a horse among them—which is a tale yet told as an unknowable mystery, since no man saw them clearly. And they continued to run; nor did they swerve for rivers or for mountains. Those that fell, fell; those that lived ran on.

The Pacific held her secrets well. On her wooded shores, baffled, the migration stopped. It did not turn aside. The overmastering call led straight into lands long since seized by the ocean. The foremost ranks of the gray droves perished in the breakers. The others, consumed and feverish with the call that was greater than life itself, fell upon the animal life of the Yachats country with the madness of disappointment.

BLACK BUCK heard the drumming of little hoofs, and sat up on the rotting bunk where he slept. Strange though the baby thunder of those hoofs was in the peaceful coast country, yet Buck was instantly alert—he had met a tumultuous sea of bristly backs in Criminal Gulch the night before. His country was occupied by droves of beasts whose like he had never known save in dreams. Greater than all the problems of the past was this one now facing him. And although the song arising from the land was changed,—although fear rustled in the leaves and all creatures lay hidden, and Black Buck knew not how to move,—none as yet fully understood how great this problem and how merciless this terror that had poured out of the south.

The rushing horde drew closer. Buck waited. An eddy of it swirled into the shanty—Buck's shanty, where a kindly man had lived, and loved him. The runty beasts surrounded the shanty, filled it and struggled under it. Their color was curious and abominable—each bristle ringed with yellow and black. Their necks were collared. Little dripping tusks protruded from their snouts. Buck leaped

into their midst and slew two,—they died hard,—was forced against a wall, and leaped over them, ripping and slashing where he alighted. The peccaries beneath the shanty were filtering out—Buck killed them one by one as they emerged, until he was himself swept away in the midst of the gray sea. And he fought with them, and killed them, one at a time, and one after another. But the ranks closed; the many he killed were not a handful in the whole. All the while the horde swept on, and Black Buck was swept with it, leaping above it, singling out individuals for his tearing fangs, yet forced on by a power greater than any individual, and which must in the end destroy whatever it met.

Buck worked toward one side. He gave over seizing their throats. Instead, he dived at their flanks, crushing leg-bones with swift snaps—a javelin down being a javelin dead under the hoofs of his fellows. This method took but a short second. Beast after beast went down. Yet when the dog at last escaped, he was near to exhaustion. He bore fresh wounds. And it had been proved to him, for the second time, that individual prowess could not cope with endless numbers.

Long it had been since any turn of life had given Buck such feelings of rage and impotency. He gathered his strength and fell on the flanks of the running drove. He never let be; he was merciless. He was still harassing them in the night, leaving scattered carcasses behind, when a squad broke from the main mad herd and hid under a cedar deadfall. The last one backed in, its nose pointed out, and acted as guard. Black Buck also stood guard. Here was a chance to kill many quickly. He waited. They must come out, one at a time.

THE squirming and squealing beneath the log tantalized Buck. He dug, with jaws and paws. The bright little eyes of the guard retreated. The squealing and squirming doubled. Buck dug faster.

Sometimes a rush and swirl passed in the forest, where the main herd ran headlong, lacking the sense to rest. Buck traded snarls with the guard, and reached in a paw for him. And then the whole herd, the main herd, poured over the log. Buck's prisoners were released; and he was swept before the sea of beasts, fighting to live.

He killed; and with a new note of madness, a squad of the wild pigs buried him. He became a vortex. The whole herd seemed trying to sweep on top of him. He received gashes. He reached the throat of the swine whose tusks were in his flank. Then he shook free.

He fled. Nor did he flee alone. Other creatures hurtled ahead of the gray tidal wave. Buck passed a black bear, fat and wheezing. The pigs reached him, swarmed over him, buzzed about him and swept on. The doe would not leave her fawn, and the fawn was slow on its legs. They became the center of a momentary whirlpool of bristling gray.

Buck skulked into a dry river-bed and slowed to a trot. His mind was as disturbed as his outer flesh. He could form no plan of action. All past experience stood him in poor stead. Even the strength in his jaws and shoulders could not cope with the endless swarms of swine. Long he had been master, and a stranger to terror. Invaders and residents alike had come to respect him. And now he skulked in hiding from little beasts no larger than a wolf pup.

The river-bed that hid him bore a bad name. Its ways were devious. In a moist coast land where living rivers and rivulets competed everywhere for the abundant water, this river was often dry. Its waters lost themselves in shoals of sand, and the surface of these sands was never quiet. There were pools of water here and there, and these pools, likewise, usually changed locations with each new sun. The stream-bed was a little world in flux, fed from a mountain of white pounded sea-sand strangely distant from the sea.

Creatures lived along it whose natures tallied with the nature of the stream. Only when hard-pressed did the solid middle-class residents of the coast skulk in this gully.

Buck was not alone. Before him ran an exhausted deer, and behind him a rabbit. The deer swam a pool, and Buck followed. Midway in the pool he changed his course. Something had happened to the deer. He saw it climb out on the sand, shake itself, start on—and sink.

Buck swam away from that shore. He scrambled up the rocky side of the pool until he reached a boulder from which he could see the river of doubt below, and the jumbled crisscross mountains of his

demesne outspread behind him. He put out his paws, laid his head on them, and dozing, relived the terror of the night.

BUCK blinked his eyes in the nooning sun. Sounds came from below. The peculiar populace of the forbidding creek was at work. A beaver busily gnawed around and around the base of the center tree in a trio of cottonwoods. He was fresh from the pond that here filled the river-bed. Fat and glistening, he stood upright, clinching the cottonwood with his forepaws while he methodically girdled it. The trees on both sides of him were girdled deeply, and he might have felled either of them with little trouble. Yet in his own careless, industrious way he had singled out a new tree for attack. Some day he would fell them one after the other; meanwhile the business of gnawing round and round them each was fun enough for him.

His slipshod business methods showed also in the location of his home. The creatures were few who did not intuitively shun this river that flowed more sand than water. The oblivious beaver toiled on in a futile effort to dam it, and enjoyed his toil.

Buck almost forgot the terror that was destroying his land. Directly below him, in a rock-strewn crevasse leading from the river, other sounds caught his ears, and movement drew his eyes. Mottled, sinuous forms were gliding from under a ledge and thawing among the hot rocks. The place was alive with them. They writhed in masses, glided over themselves, and spread out slowly like a heavy liquid. As the sun warmed them, they traveled among the rocks until they covered the crevasse.

A dry buzz came from among them. Buck's back-hair bristled at the sound. He saw its cause. A coyote, harried, bloody and panting, terrorized into forgetting the terror abiding in this place of hisses, blundered among the rocks. He yelped and sprang for the water. More than one rattlesnake fang was left in his flanks. Buck knew that he would die.

At this disturbance the beaver stopped his lumbering operations and slipped into the pool. Buck saw him again, cleaving a V toward the place of hisses. Climbing out, the rotund beaver headed straight for the mass of snakes as if unconscious of their presence.

Buck raised his head to see. He understood that the coyote had entered the place of hisses through desperation, but the beaver was not desperate; he was not fleeing for life from a horde of little mad pigs. He passed through the place unscathed. He passed through, and yet he did not pass through; he followed an uneven line on the side on the crevasse just out of reach of the rattlers. To Buck's eyes the beaver's passage revealed a regular pathway. He understood; and the beaver, his cheeks bulging with some particular viand from the underbrush, confirmed him by coming back the same way.

A VOLLEY of plumed quail burst among the rocks, and a few escaped to take wing again. They had flown from one terror into another.

Buck stood up. He was particularly fond of quail. He traveled. The stiffness of his wounds wore off. Some wolves joined him. It was the ungregarious season, but they were driven together by fear. And fear was everywhere. The terror from the south had swept the country clean. Everywhere the marks of its passing were written. Flat and wet bits of deer and bear Buck found. The thick pink skull of a lynx, and the thigh of a wild steer lay together. Buck's fat and populous land was desolated.

It was the oldest question of the universe raised anew. Which race should die, which should live? Buck and his wolf brethren sat on threatened thrones.

Buck ran on through the ruins. He did not need a nose to locate the peccaries. Fleet beasts began to pour by: frightened deer, bounding cougars, small cats, fisher, marten, mink and boomers—then the gray southern hordes. Buck snarled and hesitated. They were little beasts, scarcely reaching to his massive shoulders; but their numbers were legion, and they knew no fear. Buck ran from them.

And he knew where he ran, and why. It was the sun behind the three cottonwood trees at the place of hisses that made his thought complete. The gray horde chased him as though he were a common creature, and he led them as by their noses on a trail of his own choosing, and down into the place of hisses.

All but one of his wolves understood to follow him on the safe little beaver trail, and this one paid the price the stupid

always pay—but not from the snakes that Black Buck had counted on.

For there were no snakes. It was sun-down, and cool, and there were no snakes. The swine poured into the gorge and trampled themselves to death, but there were no thousands of snakes to strike them. And the foremost of the wild pigs were hard on Buck's heels even in the pond, and they swam the pond as madly as they ran on foot. Buck fled into the farther timber, and now he fled in earnest.

The incident of the cougar, who lived to rip and fling a score of the swine into eternity, gave Buck his chance to escape. He did not take it. He would no longer dodge and scurry and live in trembling. If he did not think it out in consecutive terms, his determination nevertheless was to kill his enemies or be killed by them. And he was not without a plan, albeit his course was rambling. He was playing for time.

The ancient burns helped him to squander time. Here great prostrate trunks, some of them two hundred feet long, lay in every direction. Being cedar, they were white and sound after a century of death. Buck reached one of these a jump ahead of the javelins, running its length. He leaped, and did not fall among them, but reached another trunk. The peccaries thronged beside him, and there was no pause. If Buck slackened pace, waves of the mad swine rushed over the log. From time to time the herd fastened on other victims, but always he returned to Buck. And always he awaited it, almost trampled under its cleaving hoofs, yet never trampled.

SO went the night. In the hours of morning the wild pigs killed their own straggling weaklings and swept like a flood after the dog. Jungled swales, and ravines jammed with the draggles of the wilderness, were Buck's favorite offerings, and in these the javelins smashed against huge rotting logs and broke their ranks squirming through tough vine-maple hedges.

As he ran, Buck watched his ally the sun. When it was overhead, he was ready. He leaped away down-mountain, and the terror from the south rushed after him, stamping out whatever life it came upon.

The beaver was having his last fun. The three cottonwoods were again Buck's

goal, and as he neared them, one went down. But Buck was not concerned with the beaver. He was watching for the first rattlesnakes.

The sun had done its work. The crevasse was alive with rattlers. A pair of wolves, scared up by the wild pigs, ran beside Buck. They took the beaver-path. The javelins crushed into the crevasse, wave upon wave. There was sudden venomous activity, shrill grunts and darting serpents. The gray terror was beset.

But the snakes could not kill. Their poison was unavailing. Pigs are pigs, and always the breed has been immune. Swollen places sprang up under the bristles of the swine as they tore the rattlers to bits. But this was all. Hundreds were bitten; none died. And no more than pausing, the horde swept on for Buck and the pool.

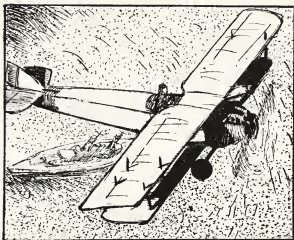
Buck rushed for the inevitable swim. The race would be close. If he entered the teeming crevasse, he would be buried under myriads of pigs. And then at the brink he hesitated. A greater peril faced him.

The pool was gone. A lake of sand, part wet, part dry, filled the river-bed. It was slowly heaving, like porridge. Wet, soupy sand came up where it heaved.

Buck saw the fool beaver. He was out on his cottonwood, hastening from the uproar. The fallen tree spanned the river, bank to bank. In places the sand was rising gently and covering the tree.

Buck led the way. A clumsy wolf, following him, fell from the tree, and the sand took him. The javelins poured over the brink. Mass upon mass, they melted into the undulating sand, going at last to the land from which the strange call had come to set them mad. Only those crossed the river who were supported, at the last, on the kicking bodies of their brothers. Fewer yet escaped Black Buck, who waited on the other side.

IN his cabin beyond Criminal Gulch a half-breed Indian roused out of comfortable thoughts. From the direction of his corral came a sound of scurrying feet. He had been wondering where he could steal a horse to replace the one the devil-pigs had killed. Unbarring his door, he saw a strange sight—Black Buck, the great dog, with a pack of wolves hard on the heels of three badly battered devil-pigs, who ran like mad into the south.



Free Lances in Diplomacy

"A Challenge to the Submarine" describes a game played for life-or-death stakes in an effort to solve a big international problem.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

IT makes considerable difference whether one is merely a celebrity or a really big man. The Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint had been for years personages of world-wide prominence—their doings being cabled as society-notes to leading papers in every country, their portraits reproduced as frequently, everywhere. After the relinquishment of their titles and retirement to private life, and after the month of widespread publicity resulting from this, it seemed to readers of the society news-columns as if the family had dropped completely out of sight and become *déclassé*, as a certain minor part of the British aristocracy insisted and did their best to make an accomplished fact. But if they fancied they could send people of the Trevors' caliber to coventry, they simply didn't realize the overwhelming popularity among all sorts and conditions of people which the Trevors had been accumulating for years in every part of the world. If readers of the society columns had taken the trouble to look through other pages of the same papers, they frequently would have come upon paragraphs relating to the activities of Mr. or Mrs. George L.

Trevor in educational work, newspaper-syndicate matters, shipbuilding, development-operations in other countries, financing this or that industry. In another direction, some hint of the actual influence they had been constantly exerting, with no appearance of doing so, was given in remarks made by Lord Blemestone at the reception and ball given by a certain popular duchess one evening.

"Confound it all! I miss the Trevors like the very deuce at affairs like this, you know! When they were in the peerage, they were courteous enough to show up at most affairs where the hostess had any decent right to expect them—even at frequent inconvenience to themselves. Knowin' where one was likely to run across either or both of 'em, it was not so difficult, d'ye see, to ask a question about this or the other matter upon which, as it always turned out, they were unusually well informed. But it's the deuce to get hold of either one, now, for a hint that one may need like the very devil! Telephone their Park Lane house—they're in the Avenue de Neuilly, Paris, at the moment. Get their mansion over there on the long

distance, an' they've sailed from Brest on their yacht for some business conference at Naples or Cairo. Next thing you know, some one sees 'em down at Trevor Hall in Devon, workin' out some invention in the shops an' laboratory they have on the estate."

"What has become of their son—who was formerly Viscount Dartmoor?"

"My word! The lad rather surprised a few of the rotters he used to go about with, last week—evidently you've not read the news-sheets, since! One night at the club some weeks ago he accused Captain Jevons-Mandeville of cheating at cards an' rook-ing him, an' the Captain said he'd publicly thrash him unless he apologized. Of course the boy couldn't *prove* his accusation! Well, the Captain, carryin' a heavy dog-whip, met young Trevor in front of the club last week an' started to slash him. But the lad tore the whip out of his hand an' lathered him until Jevons-Mandeville begged off—the Captain couldn't get anywhere near him with his fists! Three nights later the boy's father was asked to sit in at a game of cards when the Captain happened to be one of the party. After an hour or so of rather stiff play he reached over, ripped open the Captain's waistcoat, showin' a number of cards tucked up under it—then pulled several more from his left sleeve. The fellow left for the Continent next mornin', an' it's not likely he'll show his face in London again. As for young Trevor, he recently accepted a very flattering offer from the French Government to manage an experimental plant in the Aviation Corps, an' is showin' himself a bit of a genius at that sort of thing—has a lot of original an' most excellent ideas."

WHILE His Lordship and the Duchess talked, they were approached by one of the Cabinet Ministers, who stood just behind them for a moment or so before they noticed him—long enough to hear something of what they had been saying about the Trevors. Presently he joined in the conversation with a query:

"I wonder what Trevor would make of the present misunderstanding into which we are drifting with France—whether he really believes the Briand ministry likely to resign, and why they should do so? The Premier expects to cross the Channel by airplane in the morning for a conference with some of the important men over

yon. It is possible that I may go with him."

"I was told this morning that the Trevors are now in Paris—likely to be there for a fortnight or more. Doubtless if you an' the Premier happen to drop in at the Avenue de Neuilly house, you might at least get an expression of opinion."

ON a certain evening in January the drawing-room of the Trevor mansion in Paris held a number of very well-known people—French and English statesmen, American bankers and commercial leaders, an Italian marquis, two divas from the Opéra, a California beauty, the daughter of Trevor's former mining-partner in the earlier days. During the evening two British statesmen, three Frenchmen and an American banker drew Trevor aside in a corner and tried to get an expression of opinion upon political affairs—with the result that all were rather hotly arguing their *own* theories before the conversation had gone very far. Presently Trevor said, rather impatiently:

"Gentlemen, it seems to me that you're all of you right upon some points and surprisingly wrong upon others. Your eyes appear to be focused so closely upon immediate causes of dispute that I think you're not getting the larger point of view at all, and you're likely to come some frightful croppers if you don't get it. I consider myself almost entirely upon the side-lines today, merely the occasional man in the street who does his own thinking—nine-tenths of them don't, of course! But for just this once, I'd kinda like to sum up for you the whole situation as it looks to me! Suppose we slip off into my den and lock the door—eh? Let's bring Marquis Frangini and our Belgian friend De Hugueson also—then we'll have a fair representation of five countries at least. I'd like to have a Nipponese with us, but there doesn't happen to be one in the house at present. Come along!"

The suggestion was attractive to all of them. Each had been secretly hoping to draw from Trevor some expression of opinion upon this or that vital topic—only to be played with by a master student of men, and made to exchange their own opinions instead. The justly famous cigars and vintage wines, usually to be had at Trevor's, were in themselves no small inducement—and each man was in a mellow,

receptive mood before their host commenced to talk.

"TAKE this question of the proposed defensive alliance between England and France," Trevor began. "France is demanding reparation in full from Germany according to the Versailles Treaty—England wishes a trade-alliance which will help to rehabilitate Germany, and is disposed to be more lenient as to reparations. It seems to me that France is clearly within her rights. If any nations are to be rehabilitated first, they should be certainly France, Belgium and Italy, who suffered most from the war, and who, when restored, are the strongest guarantors of peace in Europe. England seems willing to forget and forgive more from Germany, for the sake of trade, than I would be if I represented a nation in the same position. It is going to be hard for Germany to meet the indemnity payments? Well—possibly! But it doesn't seem quite so hard for her to pour millions of investment into the rebuilding of her merchant-marine and manufacturing industries! Personally, I would rather see those millions go toward paying for the inexcusable ruin and damage she has caused.

"Also—I don't altogether like to see factories in America and other countries shut down, throwing thousands out of employment, because they can't compete with the mass of cheap German goods now flooding their markets! To go a little farther—England objects to France's standing out for a large fleet of submarines. England is dead right—but she needn't worry! The submarine, today, is as obsolete as the first-class battleship! I'll prove that, presently! But France's insistence upon the point was unwise. Against whom does she propose to use those submarines? They were never anything but commerce-destroyers. Well? Who has the largest deep-water commerce? England, of course! Hence—a veiled threat against British commerce. But as a matter of fact, France had no such idea in mind. To suppose that, is to assume that she might declare war against England under certain conditions—which I regard as absolutely impossible!"

"Why so, Trevor? How do you reach that conclusion?"

"Let us suppose that Europe is a chess-board—with the pieces all set, the game in progress. If France declared war against England, Germany would only wait until

the British army was mobilized, and the war irrevocably started, to declare war herself against France—pour division after division through Luxembourg and Alsace. Opportunity and self-interest would compel her to do this—and inside of a month she would have the backing of a strong pan-German federation of Central-European states. England would not desire her for an ally—would give much to prevent Germany from butting in—but she would be powerless to prevent it. The result, almost inevitably, would be the conquest and occupation of France.

"In the subsequent partitioning, England would get but a small share—lucky if she got Normandy and the Departments on the Channel. This would place Germany in possession of ample submarine-bases on the Atlantic, Bay of Biscay and North Sea—ready for the conquest of England, which would assuredly follow very shortly! England would be driven back from her French territory across the Channel; then, with the enemy to the east of her and an unfriendly, if not enemy state on her west, she would stand no chance whatever—no assistance could reach her. All of which demonstrates that for France to declare war against England would be literally committing suicide. All Frenchmen know this. None would dream of such action! On the other hand, it would be equally suicidal for England to declare war against France upon any pretext whatsoever—the final outcome would be exactly the same!"

"Suppose that the commercial alliance between England and Germany is ratified—and that Germany declares war against France?"

"England would at once join forces with France to oppose Germany, regardless of any trade relations—just as she did in 1914. It would be suicide for her not to do so. And if both nations appeared to be losing in such a war, the United States must inevitably come to their assistance as she did in '17. France, Belgium and Holland are England's buffer-states. Attack them, and you menace *her*! England and France stand in the same relation to America. Subjugate, occupy them by an enemy power—and it becomes a menace which the United States cannot permit. There need be no question of a defensive alliance between any of these countries—it isn't in the least necessary. Whenever a menace arises which threatens to destroy and enslave them, one by one, self-pres-

ervation compels them to stand together as they did before! France, as the first point of attack, is fully justified in maintaining a large enough land force to check invasion at the start—get time for assistance to reach her.”

“HOW about naval disarmament—the submarine question?” inquired one of the party.

“The first-class battleship became obsolete off the Virginia capes last summer—when our Navy made the tests against the airplane attack,” replied Trevor quickly. “It was demonstrated, even then, that the most powerful battleship in the world could be disabled and sunk by bombing-planes—which of course will be vastly developed before the next war. Cruisers of thirty knots or more, and destroyers, stood a chance—but not the battleship costing ten or fifteen millions. Every chancellery in the world saw and admitted this—each was but waiting for one of the others to suggest scrapping them. As the United States had made the tests, it was assumed the suggestion, logically, would come from her. You may remember that when it was made, at the Disarmament Conference, one of the delegates observed that ‘the secret had been marvelously kept!’—and that every one at the table laughed? The proposition had been discussed and tacitly decided months before. As for the submarine—all the talk of outlawing it by international agreement is merely childish! To suppress the submarine entirely, we should go back fifty-two years, when the idea was germinating in the brain of good old Jules Verne and sequester him in some impregnable retreat before the first copy of ‘Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas’ was printed or sold. Same thing with poison gas—you would have had to put in solitary confinement all the chemists experimenting along those lines before the formulæ were figured out. Once weapons of that sort are successfully used in warfare, the next nation which finds itself fighting for existence—its back against the wall—will make use of them in sheer desperation, regardless of any previous agreement! Wars are not fought according to code; they are fought to win by the use of every possible weapon.

“No! The way to outlaw the submarine is the same old method adopted to make good Indians.’ Find the invincible answer to it—the defense and means of destruc-

tion which puts it out of business every time! We nearly got that far during the war—since then, I believe I’ve accomplished it. I mean to publish at once a wager of fifty thousand dollars that I will destroy any submarine which is in a certain specified area during two specified days, on the Western Ocean, six weeks from now. As for poison gas—the way to outlaw it is to find the sure defense against it! The remedy will be found—but once proved successful in actual war, you can’t outlaw it.”

“ARE you really in earnest, Trevor, about wagering to destroy any submarine meeting you in the Atlantic on a certain day? Do we understand that you propose risking your own life to carry out such an experiment?”

“That’s the only fair, sporting course, isn’t it? If I destroy the sub’, it’s extremely doubtful if any of her crew get to the surface alive. She’s privileged to shell or torpedo me in any ship or small-boat where I happen to be.”

“But—where will you get any submarine crew willing to accept such a risk? You figure that one of the governments will offer the sub’ for such a test, of course?”

“On the contrary! I don’t think any Government will consider itself justified in risking men’s lives to that extent. No! I expect my wager to be taken up by some syndicate who will offer a sufficiently high bonus to each man of the crew to make it an inducement—running to four or five times the amount of my wager. And the sub’ will be a German U-boat!”

“Oh, but that’s impossible, Trevor! Germany has no submarines—isn’t building any!”

“I didn’t say that Germany had! But I’ve a strong impression that far more up-to-date sub’s than anything we’ve yet seen are under construction somewhere in the world—planned by men with Teutonic names, paid for with money which was originally marks. I would almost say that I could locate the shipyard within a hundred miles or so, in some little known and otherwise uninhabited spot. You see, all Germans believe in the submarine as a weapon in war—believe there is practically no limit to its possibilities. It is to disprove that theory and possibly smoke out these powerful new undersea cruisers that I’m making this wager. I claim that the means of defense against the U-boat have

more than kept pace with the craft itself—and will increase to a point where every man sailing in one of them goes to his death."

Probably not more than one or two of the group of men who talked with Trevor that night really believed that he would actually make such a wager as he mentioned and seriously consider handling the experiment in person. Two of the Frenchmen did believe it—but they were men of imagination. The thing appealed to them as it would not have done to men of any other race—particularly the sporting chance which Trevor himself was willing to accept. The man had so very much to lose, if wiped out—was of such great economic value in the world. On the other hand, if he proved his contention, it would go far toward rendering a service to humanity which no international outlawing agreement could possibly do. One point he had asked them to consider strictly confidential—he requested that no word should be permitted to leak out as to where he expected the submarine to come from or the individuals who might possibly take up his wager.

AT the end of the week advertisements appeared in twenty leading newspapers of Europe and were cabled as news items by press syndicates all over the world. In them Trevor stated that on February 27th and 28th, he would be within the sixty-mile square-degree bounded by forty-two and forty-three west longitude—thirty-four and thirty-five north latitude—with two airplanes and one merchant-steamer of different type from anything seen before—and that he would destroy any submarine within that area at that time, or be destroyed with his 'planes and ship by the submarine. To back up this challenge, he had deposited with Messrs. Brown, Shipley & Co. of London, the sum of fifty thousand dollars, gold, against an equal amount to be deposited by anyone accepting the wager. Proof must be given that submarine, airplanes and merchant-steamer were within the described area at the specified time—and the submarine was privileged to attack any 'plane or craft of novel type found there. As the designated spot was considerably off from any of the regular ocean lanes of travel, there was practically no risk of any other craft being sunk. Either of the three types of combatants was privileged to be escorted by

other vessels to within a sixty-mile radius of the fighting area. Surrender of any combatant in token of defeat was barred—the test being designed to be a conclusive one beyond any possible dispute.

THIS challenge naturally became a topic of absorbing interest in both hemispheres. Wagers were freely offered, and taken, that Trevor's bet could not be accepted by any Government and would not by any private individuals—that an advocate of the sub' would appear and succeed in sinking Trevor's ship at least, if not his 'planes as well—that Trevor would make good his challenge and destroy the sub'. But there were not so many who cared to back the last possibility. Trevor might win, of course—but the general opinion seemed to be that he could only do so by a fluke—that the chances were somewhat against him.

The advertisements were not three days old when a party of six men gathered in an upper room of a certain house not far from the Luxembourg. Two were Berliners, one an American from New York, of unmistakable Teutonic birth, one a Swiss socialist who had managed to be returned to the French Chamber from one of the southern Departments, and two others who might have been Spanish or South American. The talk switched from German into English or Spanish, back and forth, as one or another wished to make his point clear to those of other nationalities. Ungelmann appeared to be the leading spirit—with the New Yorker Loebing a close second. One would have said they might be officers in mufti giving orders to subalterns and noncoms, by the deference paid them. But Ribiera, who might have been Portuguese or Czechoslovak by his general appearance, regardless of name, showed a little more independence than those of German birth, venturing a statement now and then which attempts at browbeating would not make him change. It was he, presently, who brought the talk to a focus.

"We might as well come to some definite understanding, Herr Ungelmann! From what you've been saying, I infer that Schminnez, in Hamburg, and the others in Charlottenberg, have practically decided upon accepting this Trevor challenge. Would you mind saying why they would do so? It brings out into the open some things which it seems to me would be safer

to keep secret for at least two or three years more. What do we gain by it?"

"This, my friend! Chermany cannot afford at this time to let an impression grow t'at t'e submarine iss no longer thoroughly effective as a commerce-destroyer. It iss t'e question of *morale* more t'an any-ting else! The sub' hass been a thing of horror, dread; people fear it whenever t'ere iss possibility that it may pe used. An-ot'er t'ing! Since t'e war, it iss assumed that Chermany hass not a single submarine. None iss being constructed in Cherman yards—we are too busy wit' t'e merchant-marine. It iss assumed t'at we cannot build sub's *undt* practice crews for t'em without t'e fact being known by .ot'er goferments. We iss subboxed to be a defeated nation w'ich cannot pay t'e piper mit indemnity installments.

"BUT subbose, now, t'e impression goes about that we couldt put our handts upon a hundert of t'e latest up-to-date submarines, any minute we feel like it? T'ere iss no law at bresant against priwate syndicates building sub's for commercial purposes if t'ey choose—*undt* conducting der experiments until t'ey haf new type of craft w'ich can remain under water longer, cruise farther, go deeper, t'an any pefore. Not'ing to hinder t'em from having ship-yards in some isolated spot w'ich nopody knows any'ing about or efen suspects. If t'ere wass war, t'ere iss not'ing to prewent t'ose syndicate' from selling t'ose submarine' to any belligerent t'ey choose! Eh? Now, as I say, if t'e impression get aroundt t'at t'ere iss so many improved submarines like t'ose already built, it shakes der *morale* of eferybody who travels der sea—t'ey do not know if perhaps war might get declared while t'ey iss on der ocean. T'ey find out t'at it iss easier to *talk* about outlawing der submarine than it iss to do it! So, if Chermany was to make war again,—quick, sometime,—she wouldt not be considered so tamn weak as she iss subboxed to be now! Well, if we let t'at challenge go mitout noticing, we spoil all der terrorizing effect. People t'ink no submarine dare fight a duel like t'at, pe-cause it wass sure to get licked. Me—an' you—we know tamn well t'at she wouldt *not* get licked! We know we win t'at fifty t'ousand. Of course it will cost us mebbe a quarter or half a million dollars in getting ready an' in bonuses for to make der crew take der risk—but we'll get der crew

an' pay der cost inside of t'at, all right. An' t'e effect iss worth it!"

"Would you be willing to cruise on that submarine yourself, Ungelmann?"

"Me? For why shouldt I do that? T'at iss for der common cattle to risk—der underlings whose lifes iss worth mebbe a few t'ousands! Me—I am worth much more! I couldt not be wasted in such foolishness like t'at if anything go wrong!"

"Trevor seems willing to risk a chance!"

"T'at iss pecause—mit an ot'erwise fairly good headt in gommercial affairs—he iss in some spots a tamn fool. T'at iss like a young boy making a dare at an-ot'er boy—grown-up men learn better. Der boy, he like to make war spectacular—charge at t'e headt of t'e regiment—wave t'e sword, w'ich iss now obsolete—*undt* lose der fight! But war iss not der spectacle—it iss exact science when played to win in t'e t'orough Cherman way. Der general, he does not ride in der front line no more. Not so—he sits five hundert miles behindt der lines in der study-chamber of der general staff—mit der maps, telegraphs und telephones. He iss not wasted against t'e pawns in t'e game. Loebing, what you t'ink about this man, Trevor, anyhow? Wass he goot for much—or chust nutty like people used to say sometimes?"

"I think you have all misunderstood the man over here—taken it for granted that he was merely a sport-loving British peer with no head for politics, as everyone said. A daring aviator and a first-class navigator—but merely for the sport of the thing! I'm betting that he and that handsome wife of his have been far more active in secret diplomacy for the last fifteen years than any of you even dream, over here. I've dropped a hint before that he'd bear watching—but everyone in Berlin simply laughed at me! Why, look here, to mention but one instance: Have you heard that Trevor flew, during the war, from his yacht in the Ægean—then a scout-cruiser of the British Navy—across the mountains to Sofia in Bulgaria—a flight which nobody had dared attempt before? And that he went from Sofia to Bucharest in disguise? And that within three days after his arrival there, your carefully planned *coup* was thwarted, in such a way that Roumania immediately declared war and joined the Entente? Some of the Austrian staff have picked up bits of circumstantial evidence which fit in and leave no doubt as to any of this!"

"So! Well, der Austrian, he beliefs anyting! He iss not t'orough—like Chermans. I nefer heard t'at story pefore—*undt* I say it iss tamn nonsense! Trevor may be a big man in some respects—but he wass no diplomat! T'at's sure!"

"Oh, say, Ungelmann—you give me a pain sometimes! There are smart men outside of Germany! Mebbe you'll wake up to the fact, some day. But let's can all that and get down to tacks! You say the higher-ups have decided to accept this challenge? If it were not for what I've heard and think about Trevor, I'd say it was a wise move! You wont have as much of a walk-over as you think—but if you sink his boat, the general effect will certainly score for Germany! Let's get down to details! What sort of a boat has he got? Where is it being built? What could you do toward destroying it before the craft can leave the yards? How do you propose to keep track of him during the next six or seven weeks? What plan have you in mind for the fight?"

UNGELMANN turned to the other Berliner.

"T'at iss in your department, Mueller! We will now haf your report, if you please."

"*Ja, mein Herr.* But if I read you a list of all the enterprises in which Trevor is interested, you will find it most difficult to pick out the ones which would tell us what we want to know. So I will mention only what I have studied out concerning him. He receives dividend-checks from the Manners & Compton Shipbuilding & Engineering Works on the Clyde, the Glenvillers Steamship Lines of London and South Shields, and the Abberwyllith Shipbuilding Company of Bristol. I assume that he is a director in all these companies, but am not sure. His daughter is a director in the Arkwright Shipping & Trading Co. of Liverpool and Hongkong. I have here a list of all steamers and other craft building or in operation by each of these companies—and as you will observe, there is no craft of unusual type in the list. Of course some of the hulls building or recently launched may have some unusual superstructure added to them before they are sent to sea, but there is nothing to indicate anything of the sort as yet—no preparations being made in the yards, no craft designed to make above eighteen or twenty knots, as far as study of their hulls

and engine-space would indicate. The new submarines, as I understand, have a cruising speed of twenty-four knots on the surface, and sixteen submerged. Presumably Trevor must have discounted that probability and allowed for it. As for destroying any craft of his before it leaves the yards, it could scarcely be done in such a way as to appear accidental. You would forfeit the wager, and it would be said everywhere that you were afraid to meet his test at sea—that you admitted defeat for the submarine right at the start!"

"T'at iss probably true. But your report haf not helped us much! We do not yet know where his craft iss puilding nor what he iss like. *Nein! Undt* we must know! Undoubtedly he builds der boat like our syndicate, in some out-of-der-way place—so nobody shouldt know. Well—t'at cannot pe helped until we track t'e man when he goes for a look at him."

"And that's not so easy either. Formerly you might recognize this man a block away, because he was so much photographed by the papers. Now—you could not pick him out of the crowd unless you had seen him every day recently."

HERE Loebbing cut in with another of his practical questions:

"If you can learn anything about his craft, of course you'll do it! But it's quite possible you may not be able to do so, any more than he will be able to locate our submarine yard. In that case, what's your idea as to the fight?"

"Well, if we haf Trevor disappear, take der forced vacation in some ole Cherman castle for a year, he couldn't keep no appointment in der ocean. *Oder*—if we find what port t'at ship of his sail from, we might sink him before he get to t'e place, when he wass not expecting anyting."

"Oh-h-h—get your damned methodical mind down to a *peace* basis, Ungelmann! This isn't war-time! This proposition is a sporting duel—to be fought in a way that is fair to both sides! You can't use war methods! Consider! The men who deposit our share of the wager with those London bankers must have the sworn recommendation of some responsible banking house as to their being men of character and business reputation! You can't deposit that money in the names of any *dummies*! Trevor issues his challenge in a thoroughly open and honorable way. Everybody knows him—knows his reputa-

tion for sporting honor and square dealing. And he doesn't propose risking his life or wager against anybody who can't be subsequently held accountable in the same way! You can't make a move against him or his craft until you get inside that square degree on the North Atlantic—and you've got to prove that your sub' was within a sixty-mile radius at the time!"

"We couldt figure der longitude from Berlin like as on der Cheranian maps, or from Ferro, like der Austrians, couldn't we? *Undt* say we wass on der spot, all right!"

"Yes—if you've nothing better to do with your time! From Berlin, forty-two degrees west would put you just beyond Madeira, in the regular lane of the South American liners. Forty-two west of Ferro would put you over within a few miles of Bermuda—another regular ocean lane! Trevor knew what he was about when he quite obviously figured Greenwich Longitude—none but a fool could question the spot!"

"Well, we gotta haf *some* advantage—just to cover der margin of bad luck undt accident! We could haf t'ree submarines on der spot, couldn't we? If nopody couldt prove t'ere wass t'at many around."

"H-m-m—yes, I think that might work. There's no stipulation against it in the wager—in fact, I've been rather surprised at the omission. Presumably, Trevor's new type of ship is to carry his seaplanes on deck until near the spot—that's the inference, anyhow. I suppose he would be within his rights if he had them carried to the sixty-mile radius by some 'mother' or supply-ship—but I'll bet five to one that he wouldn't consider that fair sport! Yes, it shouldn't be difficult to get three sub's out there without any two of them being seen near enough to check up and be discovered. Technically you could do it openly, as far as the wager is worded. But it would be bad policy for us—to admit that it took three sub's to sink one cargo-boat and escape two seaplanes! That would practically prove Trevor's contention—that the sub', on even terms, is obsolete.

"Do you know, I can't help having the feeling that we're up against a stiffer proposition than it looks on the surface! Of course, luck will count for something on either side, but Trevor is not counting on luck. He thinks that he and his craft are a match for any submarine afloat, thinks there are possibly half a dozen effective

means of defense against it. If this is really so, it will immensely strengthen the defensive power of every nation having a large merchant-marine. I think, if it can be done, we've simply got to beat him in this duel—because if we don't, it's going to remove a great deal of the present dread every nation has of the sub' as a weapon in warfare! But—by accepting the challenge, we risk doing exactly that in a way that leaves no room for argument!"

THERE is little question that if Trevor had misjudged the sort of minds he would probably find pitted against him, and had the foresight so to word his challenge as to leave very little chance for underhand advantage, he would have disappeared for an indefinite time before the appointed date. And if it had been humanly possible to men of their mental caliber, the secret agents of a certain junta in Europe would have discovered the yard where his ship was under construction, and she never would have reached deep water. But knowing exactly what he had to deal with, he had—after some hours of study covering all the possibilities—so worded his challenge that any attempt at evasion or foul play would have been considered by the world at large a definite admission that his contention against the submarine was a proved fact. Consequently he went about his daily affairs quite openly, with no attempt at disguise or mysterious disappearance on his own account. He was reported at various meetings in English and French cities—up to within three weeks of the ocean duel.

At that time he and his wife boarded their famous yacht, the *Ranee Sylvia*, at Plymouth, and sailed for the Mediterranean, as it was reported. Upon the second day following, the yacht gave her name by flags and radio to the Lloyd's station at Gibraltar, while passing through the Straits—and this news was duly wired to all newspapers which printed shipping notices. But that night, which happened to be pitch dark and squally, the *Ranee* passed out through the Straits again, heading west-south-west. At the end of the week she was off the east coast of St. Lucia, in the West Indies.

Waiting until after dark before steaming in sight of land, she was, by midnight, off a small landlocked cove leased by the Government as practice-ground for its mosquito-fleet and subleased—without the fact

being made public—to a certain shipbuilding syndicate, which, it was understood, was conducting an extended series of experiments there. When the *Ranee's* launch put Trevor ashore, he was a bearded man in rather slouchy tweeds and soft hat who bore no resemblance whatever to the famous personage whose career had been society news for so many years. And the Nan Trevor who accompanied him in an aviator's suit would not have been recognized by anyone who knew her. When the launch returned, the *Ranee* headed about and put to sea again, steering east-northeast.

IT has been understood for some years that Castries or some other port in St. Lucia has been strongly fortified and equipped by the British Government as one of the finest naval bases in the world. Whether this is altogether true or not, there are certain military areas on the island which nobody is permitted to enter, photograph or examine with a telescope from any overlooking height. The little cove on the east coast had been more or less subject to these restrictions until the inhabitants of the island had come to accept the spot as taboo and make no attempt to investigate it. As for outsiders—the one or two secret-agents who did any exploring with Castries as a base found the cove apparently unguarded, with no regular fortifications or other objects of interest to them in evidence, but were conscious of having been under espionage until they sailed for some other place. So the little cove was down in the secret reports of other nations as negligible, and no further attention had been paid to it since the war ended. With the subletting to the shipbuilding company, however, there had been various changes made. Several heavy copper wires charged with a current of high voltage had been run up the hills back of the cove at either side, around every point of vantage from which the proceedings below could be seen. Natives and white residents received warning that the wires were there,—with current enough to kill an ox if they were touched,—so there was a total lack of interest in what was supposed to be Government operations. On the ocean side, a narrow peninsula thickly covered with trees prevented any view of what went on at the head of the cove.

In a comfortable bungalow a hundred feet above sea-level Donald MacBirnie, a

naval engineer with an already brilliant record, was smoking a reflective pipe as he played chess with his foreman when the Trevors stepped upon the veranda. They had been stopped by various sentries who didn't recognize them, but had furnished a satisfactory password and climbed the hill. Neither the engineer nor his foreman could place them for the moment, until Trevor laughed and made a remark indicating knowledge of what was going on in the cove which none but the mastermind would have had, and they marveled at the perfection of the disguise.

"Well, Mac! You and Felton have had some idea all along what sort of craft you were building, but my challenge in the papers a few weeks ago told you the whole story, of course. Now—how soon will the *Turtle* be ready to sail?"

"Without the superstructure, she can leave here in the morning, sir. We've had it all bolted on,—the rubber packing fastened to the edges of the plates, an' all that,—so that it's a matter of less than a day to ship it on, at sea. But I understood that you didn't wish to clear from any port with it?"

"Right! The steel framing above the deck gives her a sort of bird-cage look which of course will arouse comment, but it's likely to pass for a new system of bracing for hoisting out cargo, I think. It's very doubtful if anyone gets a mental picture of how she looks with all the hood in place. How about your submersion?"

"Well—of course we've to allow for a slight margin of error when she's loaded, sir. But with tanks empty, I figure her Plimsoll about two feet six below her deck-level. With tanks full, the deck is three feet under water, aft, an' six inches forward. Have you fixed a cargo anywhere near by?"

"I could fill her with coffee at Maracaibo or rosin and turpentine at Fernandina, but I don't dare risk the port delays. So I've taken about three-quarters of a load in cocoa and rum from Castries on the other side of the island. We can load that in two or three days at the outside, with no delays to speak of—Government will push things for us. Could get a full cargo of sugar, as it happens, but with a new boat like this, we're likely to get a good bit of leakage, and once I was on a boat with fluid sugar in her hold. That was plenty! She turned turtle—just seven of us got out of that scrape, on a life-raft! We'll go around to Port Castries

tomorrow and load, then come back here for a few days of practice in shipping the seaplanes. You've dummy bulwarks, I suppose?"

"Aye. The posts fit into sockets along the scupper-line. When everything's bolted snug, you wouldn't notice that the bulwarks an' gunwale are detachable or that the ship is designed to be partly submersible. At sea, of course, we remove the bulwarks an' bolt in the usual low rail of iron rods—enough to keep loose stuff from washing overboard, but offering no resistance to the water we ship."

BY next afternoon the *Turtle* was in Castries harbor, loading cocoa. Her low freeboard, increased by the false bulwarks, was common enough to excite no remark. The squat-looking deck-house and short funnel were also of a type quite frequently seen. The framing of steel girders with perforated webbing which arched over the midship section was certainly a novelty, but as tackle was made fast to it over all four hatches, to lower cargo into the holds, it was generally supposed that half a dozen other hatches could be opened up in the deck-plating, making one continuous slit through which extra long cases of machinery might be lowered. In fact, while this framing was different from anything seen before, not a single person on the island happened to think of connecting the craft with Trevor's challenge to the submarine. The newspapers reported him on his yacht, somewhere in the Mediterranean or Black Sea—presumably superintending the finishing of his mysterious boat. The *Turtle*—at a small, not very much frequented port in the West Indies—was loading an honest-to-goodness cargo for London in a perfectly commonplace way, had no appearance of being the sort of craft which might be used against a submarine. She had left the little cove before daylight—and she returned to it one night after dark with her cargo aboard.

Five days later, after undergoing almost every conceivable test of submersion and speed, shipping and unshipping two other funnels between the steel bulkheads of her supposed deck-house, she stole away at midnight with two large bombing seaplanes lashed to the flat portions of her forward and after decks beyond the bird-cage framing. Sailing over the warm southern course to the Azores, there was pleasant weather and very little rough

water—but in the single taste she had of a blow, for about ten hours, she proved herself a phenomenal sea-boat.

On the second day out from St. Lucia, she was spoken by three different cargo-boats of as many nationalities, giving her name, ports of departure and destination, but no other details. It fulfilled all the requirements of the wager for her to be sighted and reported by name. The three trustworthy press-syndicate men whom Trevor had brought across with him on the yacht would begin sending out their radio dispatches as soon as they were permitted to. Later on, the *Turtle's* position upon every mile of her course would be clearly shown—and it was no part of Trevor's scheme to be definitely spotted in time to have an ambush arranged before he could look the ground over.

In due time the *Turtle* entered the sixty-mile zone surrounding the dueling rendezvous—and a most amazing transformation took place. Sheets of cast steel, molded to represent the surface, coloring and shape of a good-sized ocean wave, were bolted securely to the bird-cage framing—the joints rendered water-tight by strips of rubber packing. When all these plates were in place, the three funnels were completely masked by the crest of the steel wave—nothing but a few slim rods, invisible at two hundred feet, appearing above it to carry the radio-aërials. Then the two big 'planes were tuned up and their lashings cast off. They were built to rest safely enough upon the water when not flying, and Trevor had tested out a practical method of slinging both ammunition and gas aboard, along trolley-ropes, when 'planes and ship were more than a hundred feet apart.

AS they were nearing the rendezvous,—before Trevor and his wife got into their respective 'planes, to remain until after the fight,—MacBirnie, who never once thought of the risk he ran in seeing the adventure through, asked if his chief had any idea from which direction the submarine was likely to approach. Trevor and the handsome Nan both laughed.

"I might say 'east, south and west,' Mac! Those fellows will never risk it with a single sub—that's why I didn't specify the number in my challenge. It increases the risk for us, of course—but it settles the point more unquestionably if we sink all three as I mean to do if we pull through! Now, I may be wrong, but I expect those

sub's from the general direction of Magellan Straits—for reasons of my own. With my yacht last seen in the Mediterranean, they'll be looking for us along the east side of the square—and I figure that they'll be lying about twenty miles apart along there tomorrow night. The 27th begins at midnight of the 26th—so that it is entirely permissible for me to go for them at night from that moment. There's no moon, fortunately, and the barometer indicates a general thickening up of the weather, though I doubt if we get rain—so that they won't see us in the air until we turn on a searchlight. We'll keep pretty close to you—cruise along the southern edge of the square—then up the east side. Keep within radio-telephone reach. With the submarine-telephone-detectors on the outside of the *Turtle's* hull, it will be possible to hear their screws if they're in motion—and not expecting us from this direction, they'll probably take your screw-beats for one of the other sub's."

THE events of the following night will become a part of world history when the revised editions are written. Trevor's method of airplane attack was by utilizing the angle of light from a powerful searchlight-beam *under water*. That is, the leading 'plane, flying low, directed the beam of light astern of her at an angle of forty-five degrees—and the following 'plane, far enough in the rear to get the angle of reflection under water, was able to see quite easily the hull of any submarine within sixty or seventy feet of the surface as the light passed behind it. MacBirnle reported a sound of screws, east of them, at one in the morning—kept the 'planes informed as the sound grew louder until, without showing a light at all until practically over it, Nan Trevor caught the first sub' on the surface charging her batteries and blew it to fragments with the second bomb. Although they searched the water for half an hour—saw a lot of oil and debris—no living man came to the surface for them to rescue.

Two hours later the searchlight beam spotted another submarine about five fathoms below the surface. Its commander recognized the light as some form of attack and tried to dive deeper—but by circling, they kept the dark mass in sight long enough to drop four depth-bombs over it. Again a mass of debris and oil came bubbling up—but no living men.

Just after sunrise a third submarine was traveling at a leisurely clip on the surface, ready to submerge at a moment's warning. As far as her commander could see with his prism-binoculars, there were no airplanes in sight, nor any sort of craft on the surface. He had been trying to communicate with the other two U-boats, but strangely, could get no signals under water or radio on the surface—just silence, though by tuning down to shorter wavelengths, he learned that a dozen cargo-boat captains had come several miles out of their way hoping to catch a glimpse of the fight. His five-inch rifles were housed, as he expected to dive at any moment. His torpedoes were in their tubes, but pointed forward and aft—he would have had to turn in order to use them. Presently his glance rested idly upon a wave shorter than the others and moving in a different direction—within three hundred feet of him. Though a somewhat mechanical, theatrical-appearing wave, it closely resembled those surrounding it except that it was smaller. There was neither hull, deck, nor funnel in sight above water—looked just like the top half of a wave.

Before he could puzzle out the phenomenon or imagine it had anything to do with a ship, a couple of square openings suddenly appeared in the side of the wave, with the grim muzzles of six-inch rifles in their centers. There was a terrific concussion. A couple of projectiles tore away half the side of his craft. It went down in less than two minutes, leaving six men struggling for their lives in the water—not expecting any rescue nor seeing where it might come from. But a ship's cutter was launched in a few moments, picked five of them up and put them aboard a strange craft which had been running with storage batteries and showing not a wisp of smoke—nothing but a steel hood which looked like a wave at a short distance. The decks were gradually rising above water from the buoyancy obtained by pumping out the tanks, as they stepped on board.

Long before the *Turtle* warped into the big Albert Dock to discharge her cargo like any other honest freighter, the sworn statements of the rescued men were taken down and radiographed around the world. Newspapers everywhere appeared on the streets with six-column heads:

TREVOR WINS! DESTROYS THREE
SUBMARINES!



The Daughter of Nez Coupé

A spirited story of that little known region, the swamp-country of Louisiana.

By MEIGS O. FROST

LAZY, sun-drenched afternoon was just merging into drowsy dusk when the bow of Bruce Armitage's little cabin cruiser rounded a curve in the winding bayou. Through the puzzled frown that wrinkled his forehead, he looked out upon a scene of sunset loveliness. Unimaginable blendings of color were spread lavishly upon the western sky. Against this glory stood sharply the skeleton outlines of the cypress trunks and the massive, squat, moss-draped live-oaks.

"Here's where we bunk for the night, old son," he observed, talking to himself with the habit born of his long and lonely cruise, begun at the Mississippi's headwaters, ending now in the "Beeg Swamp" of Louisiana's Barataria wilderness.

The little anchor splashed overboard. Bow and stern lights shone, ruby, emerald and white, as he touched match to wick.

And then Armitage gave voice to the puzzle of which his frown was born.

"If that wasn't a peach of a girl spying on me from that pirogue," he murmured

as he lit his two-burner oil-stove and produced supper-things, "I'm a Chinaman!"

His thoughts back-trailed through the past few hours. Time after time, that afternoon, as he had chugged slowly down the winding reaches of Barataria Bayou, his engine throttled to half-speed, had come the same tantalizing vision. He had seen the slim bow of a swamp dugout, above which peered out a small, tanned, elfish face that watched him pass, sometimes with binoculars clamped to eyes. Twice he had spun his wheel, and swinging in a wide arc, surged close to the bank. Each time he had found only the entrance to a trickling waterway, too narrow and shallow for even his little cruiser to thread.

HAM sizzled in the diminutive frying pan. Coffee-fragrance spread through the boat.

"Ouch!"

Twin stabs of pain lanced through the back of his neck. He slapped, swore, and hastened to fasten the screens at porthole

and hatchway. The swamp mosquitoes were swarming to their nightly charge. He stopped his task for a moment as he fastened the starboard porthole screen, and leaning on elbows, looked out from the cove to where a narrow offshoot of the bayou led to a broad, shallow lake. Tiny in the distance, a motorboat chugged along. It was the only indication of humanity in sight.

Deftly he dished up the supper and sat him down to food. Outside rose the roaring chorus of the baffled mosquito hordes, drawn by the unerring instinct of their tribe. Then, with the luxury of careless and care-free bachelorhood, he stretched out for a cigarette before dish-washing time.

IT had been a marvel of a cruise, he mused. All rested up and fit again! Weeks of lazing along or speeding, as the spirit willed, down that pathway of the age-old river, past farm and town and city, past sandy bank and high-towering bluff, past the shanty-boat colonies of the rivermen. And now the mystery of the Louisiana swamps to top it, before he emerged into the Gulf, rounded into the river again through the Passes, and wound up at New Orleans.

Then what? Back to the Chicago office where he had been plugging two years, a very junior lawyer, until his father's death, the comfortable inheritance, and the outdoor yearning bred of his months in training-camp and overseas had driven him forth on that Quixotic cruise? Oh, why worry? That would all arrange itself somehow. In time, he'd—

The boat quivered and heeled to sudden rough impact.

"Who's there?" he shouted.

Heavy steps sounded on the small deck aft.

"Open up!" commanded a hoarse voice.

Through Bruce's mind flashed warnings of river-pirates, imparted by friendly boatmen he had smilingly thought were trying to "pull his leg."

"Coming!" he called, and rose to his feet. Then with a sudden swoop he extinguished the cabin lamp and reached for the shotgun slung on brackets just above his bunk. Crouching low, he moved toward the aft hatchway.

"Who's there? What d'you want?"

"D'yuh open it, or do we smash it?" came the ultimatum from outside.

Armitage's temper flared.

"Smash and be damned! But take it from me, you'd better get off that deck before I blow a hole in you!"

There was a sudden rush of footsteps as two men leaped into the launch alongside—a launch they had paddled up silently lest the engine give warning.

"I tol' yo' he is sho' got gun," sounded a drawling voice to Armitage's ears. "Yo' go too fas', my frien'."

Followed words in undertones too light for him to catch. Then a 'longside call.

"Listen, Paxton: Yo' swing 'at boat roun', an' yo' head fo' N'Awlyins now, this minute! Trouble if yo' don'."

"My name's not Paxton!" shot back Bruce grimly. "And I'm not taking orders from anybody I don't know. Come clean on this stuff or beat it before I bore you."

"Aw right, brotheh," came the mocking call. "Yo' askin' fo' it. Yo' get it. Yo' aint outa heah in ten minutes, things gonna happen."

Sounded then the snort of a gasoline engine as some one invisible spun the starting-wheel. A *put-put-put* grōwing fainter in the darkness, and Armitage was alone once more.

Back from hatchway into cabin he slipped, groped until he grasped his electric torch, discarded shotgun for his old service automatic, and headed for the forward hatch.

"Seems I've got ten minutes, anyway," he said to himself grimly. "Let's see who or what they left behind."

SOFTLY he let himself through the opening as the screen slid out silently. Up on the cabin roof he wormed his way, thrusting the pistol ahead. Then, stretched prone, he held the flashlight far out, arm's-length from his body, and shoved the switch forward. The beam pierced the night. Swiftly he swept it from end to end of his small craft. He was in 'full possession, quite alone.

But even as he snapped off the light, from out the dark came a sardonic hail:

"Time's gettin' sho't! Ten minutes, Paxton! Then watch out!"

Back in the cabin, Bruce sat in the dark, trying to figure it out.

"This Paxton bird doesn't seem to be the fair-haired hero down here, whoever he is. Wonder who he dealt the fifth ace to? What they going to do in ten minutes, anyway? Torpedo me, *spurlos versenkt*?

Nice, cordial sort of welcome to a stranger! This got anything to do with that swamp-girl spying on me all afternoon? Fat chance I'd have, blundering back-trail up this bayou in the dark. Maybe they'll listen to reason."

Out aft he headed again, precautionary shotgun in hand.

"Hey, you out there," he called into the dark. "You've got the wrong man. I'm not Paxton."

Faintly a laugh rang, somewhere beyond eye-range.

"Time's up, Paxton! Betteh dive!"

A long streak of flame split the blanket-ing blackness. A smack and a slight shiver of the little cruiser followed.

"Why, damn 'em," said Bruce with surprised conviction. "They're firing on me!"

They certainly were.

Instinctively he threw himself flat on the tiny after-deck.

SHOT followed shot. And it dawned upon him that every shot was striking far forward in the bow. The riding lights! That was it! The dull red glow of the starboard lamp made a perfect target in the night. And then came speeding another thought that struck sickeningly at the pit of his stomach. Nobody shot idly at a light. The gasoline-tank! It was in the bow compartment! That's where they were aiming, with that accursed red light to show the way.

He thrust his shotgun over the thwart, waited for the next flash, and emptied his magazine as fast as he could pump the slide.

"Might as well spray perfume at 'em," he muttered, as steadily came the fusillade from that high-powered rifle, cracking whip-like across the water. It would be suicide to try and go forward and extinguish those bow lights.

And then it happened! A bullet shattered that red starboard light. Tinkling glass sounded. Blazing oil sprayed outboard and met the trickling, floating gasoline from the riddled bow.

Flame blasted a wide circle in the dark. The gasoline tank had exploded.

One with the crash was Bruce's dive. With long overarm strokes, swimming silently, he made for the bank of the little cove.

Breathless at the swift disaster, he drew himself up on the coarse grass, took a few steps ahead, stumbled over the gnarled

roots of one of the live-oaks, and sat down, dripping, on its rough surface. A mosquito, lighting silently on his nose, thrust home a poisoned proboscis.

"I wonder," said Bruce, "if this is some of that famous Southern hospitality?"

Absently he searched through soaked pockets of his khaki trousers. A grin widened on his face. His little waterproof pouch of matches was there. In a hip pocket was an unopened package of cigarettes. Their foil and waxed paper had resisted the brief submersion.

"For small mercies, oh, Lord—" he soliloquized, and moving behind the sheltering trunk of his live-oak, he crouched near its base, struck a light, and inhaled deeply. Might as well be careful. No need showing any flares. Those babies out there might still be waiting for their little playmate Paxton. Who the devil was this Paxton, anyway?

Fine fix that bird's affairs had left him in. Cruiser lost, himself soaked and shivering, miles the other side of nowhere. Well, cheerio! Daylight was only seven or eight or ten hours away. Probably some trapper or swamper or somebody he could find around by next morning if these blasted mosquitoes didn't pick his bones by dawn. Cordial brutes!

Hullo! What was that? More of Paxton's little playmates?

A long beam of light flashed from somewhere up the bayou. To his ears came the splash of smitten water. Intently he peered toward the sound.

Down the bayou came lumbering one of the surviving river-packets of the olden days, now condemned in her battered age to carry freight and passengers on the swamp run to far coastal settlements.

Would they hear his call from the bank, above the clatter of that ancient engine? Was there time to light a signal-fire? Would they heed it, anyway? Mightn't they think it merely some camping swamper? Better play safe. And it would be a gamble, at that.

He took one last mournful drag at his cigarette and arose grimly.

JIM, negro fireman on the ancient packet *Hélaise*, leaned against a lower-deck stanchion looking blankly out into the dark as the old tub surged along. Scarce a foot below the low and splintery thwart of the lower deck was the black mass of the bayou's water. Out of the dark, looming

white, with wet-plastered hair, came a man's face. An out-thrust hand clutched the planking at Jim's feet. It slipped—and then grasped a mooring-bitt—and held! Jim's eyes distended. With a wild howl he fled forward, chattering his tale of the "wateh-ghos'."

The scoffingly incredulous reinforcements he brought back found Bruce stretched on the grimy deck, slowly recovering from his exhaustion. It had been no light feat to swim out ahead of the oncoming packet, tread water until her bow came alongside, fight the wash of her swell, and drag himself aboard.

Sodden, breathing hard, he was led before Captain Didier Dantin of the *Héloise*. That master of craft, his rank indicated only by a tattered blue-peaked yachting cap with broken visor, was lounging in the pilot-house, smoking endless cigarettes of the harsh black bayou "string tobacco."

Instinctively Bruce warmed to the weather-beaten old swamp skipper from the first sound of his voice. But at that, he felt it the course of wisdom to hold back some of his startling experiences of the night.

"Bruce Armitage," he introduced himself. "Coming out of New Orleans on a fishing-trip and a little cruise. Gasoline leak. Boat burned. Camped on the bank until you came along. Swam out and boarded you."

"I'm Cap'n Didier Dantin," the old man smiled. "Folks mos'y calls me ol' man Cap'n, down heah. Glad to find yo' abo'd. Yo' city folks mos' always gettin' in trouble down thisaway. Kinda damp, aint yo'? Reckon we can fix yo' up with some overalls an' a shirt an' maybe some shoes. How'd yo' lak some coffee?"

LIKE it! Bruce stood for a shivering moment while the tin cup of almost-boiling jet-black drip was brought, and tingled clear down to his toes as he gulped it gratefully.

"Betteh get into these dry things up heah," he heard the gentle voice of old Didier Dantin. "That lookin'-glass is kinda cracked, but I reckon yo' can see to slick yo' hair in it. Then we'll go down below an' meet the ladies."

Bruce, rubbing himself dry with a diminutive brown towel, stopped and gasped.

"Ladies?"

"Sho'. Ladies an' lumber an' 'lasses! Sweetest cargo th' ol' *Héloise* eveh done

toted. Ladies sweeter'n the 'lasses, too. Big dance tomorra night down at Gran' Isle. Got the fiddleh abo'd too. An' a felleh c'n make the Dutch irritator talk lak a dream."

BRUCE gasped again. Lost in mid-swamp one moment, perched on a mosquito-swarming bayou-bank. Headed for a dance a few minutes later, with a cargo of pretty girls and the music! Things moved fast in this bayou-world. He gazed at his emergency outfit—baggy overalls, gray flannel shirt and knobby-toed "ox-blood" shoes—these last contributed by Jim, the negro fireman his ghostly appearance had half paralyzed with fright. He passed his hand over his wet and freshly "slicked" hair, and grinned.

"All right, Cap'n. Lead me to the social slaughter. I'm all dressed up."

"Sho'!" said ol' man Cap'n deprecatingly. "Yo' all right fo' the bayou. Reg-leh belle o' the ball."

Down the ladder from the pilot-house they climbed, to a group gathered on the forward deck under a dim-burning lantern. Some one was strumming softly on a wire-strung banjo to the low accompaniment of an accordion—the "Dutch irritator" that had puzzled Bruce a moment earlier. In that queerly gentle voice of his, Captain Dantin made the presentation.

"Misteh Bruce Armitage, ladies an' gents," said he. "City felleh! Done los' his boat. Gazzoline feh. Bu'nt up. Sat on the bank. Wouldn't take any otheh boat till he saw all yo' pretty gals comin' along on th' ol' *Héloise*. Swam abo'd. We got him dry an' fulla coffee so's he wont get swamp-feveh. Now he's goin' to that dance with us."

There were shy acknowledgments from bayou girls and youths as Bruce shook hands and repeated names. And then, with a sudden start, he was looking into a small, tanned, elfin face, dim in the lantern-light, topping a slim figure in khaki skirt and flannel blouse.

"Miss Armaid Santiney," somebody was saying.

Her voice, too, was soft, though her manners were without the shyness of the bayou folk. Bruce held himself in rigid control, his brain astorm, as he took the tanned, hard little hand in the grip of greeting. Santiney! Where had he heard that name before? It rang somewhere in his memory.

"I'm glad you're going to our dance," her voice was saying.

GR^{EAT} Lord and all the archangels! This was the girl he had glimpsed that afternoon—the swamp-girl who in her pirogue had spied upon him from half a dozen points along the winding bayou, the girl whose espionage had been followed by such swift and deadly action against the mysterious Paxton, with Bruce Armitage the victim. What could it all mean?

"Rather afraid I've invited myself," said he. "Awf'ly impetuous of me! And I haven't brought along my evening clothes, as you see."

"Oh, we're very informal down here," she said lightly. "This chiffon confection I'm wearing will serve me quite well for the court ball, kind sir."

She looked smilingly at her stained khaki.

Where had he heard that name Santiney? It was too unusual for careless forgetting.

"Spar along for time, old son," he said to himself. "This thing has got to clear up."

"Anyway, I have some gorgeous dancing pumps," he said aloud. "Thanks to a kindly Samaritan called Niggeh Jim, who nearly let me drown." He eyed the bulbous-toed and sanguinary horrors that encased his sockless feet. "Wonder if I could get any kind of an outfit at this Grand Isle where we're heading?"

"It seems to me you're frightfully fussy," she returned.

Why was she eying him so closely? Confound it.

"But if your manly beauty needs must be adorned, I think that Boulou Lafont's store at Grand Isle can fit you out—with some real 'sto' clo'es." His kampus-kut styles are esteemed highly by our youth."

Close by them the banjo and the Dutch irritator, after sundry sighting-shots at harmony, burst into a strange and plaintive melody. About them rose blended voices.

*Si to te 'tite zozo
Et je me moti fusil,
Mo tsre tchou toi: Boom!
Mo tsre tchou toi: Boom!
Ah, cher bijou
D'acajou,
Mo laimin to
Comme cochon aimin la boue!*

Bruce looked curiously at the girl, as with eyes half closed, throat pulsing like

a bird's, she sang through with the rest in her clear contralto. The barbarous words floated, strangely softened, through the night.

"Good Lord, Miss Santiney, what was that song?" he asked.

"I'm afraid your university French didn't include a course in Cajun," she smiled. "That's a very old and honorable love-song in these parts. I wont attempt to translate it in verse, but here's the meaning: 'If thou wert a little bird and I were a gun, I would shoot thee. Boom! Ah, dear little mahogany jewel, I love thee as the little pig loves the mud!'"

"Practical souls, these Cajun suitors."

"They know a simile when they see one," she countered, "—which is more than you can say for some of our modern poets. Birds and guns and pigs are right where they live, down here."

Lightly she laughed, and then she added:

"It seems to me that you'd better roll up in ol' man Cap'n's pilot-house and get some sleep. You look almost worn out. And there are several things I'd like to talk about with you tomorrow. And—"

"Oh, I'm all right," he spoke up eagerly.

"And," she continued serenely, "your otherwise perfectly formed nose is all puffy with mosquito-bites."

His hand went to his face with instant concern.

"Vanity—vanity!" she mocked. "I'm sorry we have so few aids to beauty here, but I'm sure ol' man Cap'n can give you some pine oil. That'll take out the sting. Really! These boys and girls are going to stay up and sing, probably, until we reach Grand Isle. That'll be after midnight."

"I'm going to stay up too," said he, massaging his nose ruefully, "though I wont sing. But thanks for the pine-oil suggestion. I'll get some, if you'll excuse me."

CAP'N DIDIER, inevitably, was rolling another string-tobacco cigarette when Bruce entered the texas of the lumbering craft and made known his wants.

"Pine oil? Sho'. May help. We ol' swamphehs kinda get used to mosquitoes after the first twenty yeaahs."

Bruce rubbed the stinging fluid on his swollen nose.

"Captain," said he, winking back the tears, "who is that Miss Santiney?"

"Oh, ho," chuckled Cap'n Didier. "Hit

already? Count on yo' city fellehs fo' quick wo'k in pickin' out the pretties' gal in sight. But yo' betteh watch out, son. She's the fines' gal on the whole South Coast 'bout. But her ol' man is sho' pizen."

"Who is he?"

"Ol' Etienne Santiney. Nez Coupé, they call him, when he aint aroun'. That means Slit-nose in Cajun. Must be a millionaire, mighty neah. Owns a string o' shrimp-platfo'ms an' a fleet o' luggehs an' a office in town. Got his finge in all kinda business up 'n' down this coast. Even names the sheriff, an' we votes fo' him. If I had his money, I'd quit runnin' this ol' mud-scow an' live in the city an' see the movies eve'y day lak a millionaire. But yo' betteh watch out fo' him, son, I'm tellin' yo'."

"What's the matter?" queried Bruce, striving to speak casually and veil the keen interest that surged within him. "Old boy specially poisonous just now?"

"Yo' said it. O'dina'y he can give a swamp moccasin the first bite an' then outpizen him. These days, what with this fella Paxton an' all, if ol' Etienne hit a man, the styles in men's clo'es ud be plumb changed by the time 'at fella traveled back to wheah Etienne hit him."

PAXTON again! Maybe here would come some more light.

"What's all this Paxton trouble?"

But Cap'n Didier was strangely absent-minded.

"That gal o' Etienne's, now, she's sho' pretty," he opined. "Been East to some school. Come back heah eve'y yeah, though. Aint stuck up a-tall. Been to N'Yawk an' Washin'ton City an' 'bout eve'ywheahs, I reckon, too. But she 'members all her ol' bayou frien's. Paddle a pirogue, shoot, an' run a gazzoline well as any man on the coast. Bo'n on the shrimp platfo'm at Manila Village, she was. Says she's got th' 'Beeg Swamp' in her blood.

"It's a wondeh she aint got swamp feveh in it, way she paddles ro'n' all houahs. I done pick her up in that pirogue o' hers 'bout an houah befo' yo' swum abo'd. That's the pirogue out theah on th' aft-deck, now."

"This Paxton trouble," pursued Bruce, "I heard a little, something about it the other day."

But ol' man Cap'n Didier was not to be drawn.

"Oh, jus' a li'le trouble. That's all,"

he murmured deprecatingly. "Yo'll heah all sorteh talk roun' heah."

AND he resumed his discourse on old Etienne Santiney and his domain. Ramblingly ol' man Cap'n talked ahead, glad of a listener, while in Bruce's mind the picture his soft *argot* drew filled in with broad splashes of color.

Etienne Santiney! That was the name by which men knew him who trafficked at his small and grimy office in New Orleans. But up and down the reaches of the Louisiana south coast, known to shrimp, fisher, oysterman and trapper by that other sinister title—"Slit-nose!" Lord of the high justice, the middle and the low, in a strange kingdom of "floating prairie" and marsh-land, impenetrable to all save the expert "swamp-walker" or the surface-skimming pirogue. Shrimp villages on their huge drying-platforms, spraddled like grotesque gigantic centipedes on their thousand legs of piling against the horizon; broad bayous, sleeping beneath their green and purple coverlet of water hyacinths, or with their black, still waters torn by prow and propeller of the "gazzoline" luggers; narrow, winding waterways, lined with strange fungous growths, livid against the rustling roseau-cane and the greenish-grayish-brown of the marsh-grass and the scrubby latanier palms.

Here ruled "Naze Coupay," as the Cajuns' slurring tongues voiced the title that had come down through the years from one of the lieutenants of the pirate Jean Lafitte. It was a knife-thrust, warded upward in swift parry in one of the wild fights at the Manila Village shrimp-platform down on Barataria Bay that marked Etienne Santiney with the scar that had rechristened him.

"So yo' see, he's a bad man to rile, son," drawled ol' man Cap'n.

"Sounds probable," conceded Bruce. And then to himself: "I judge this bird Paxton must have riled him."

Didier finished rolling his cigarette.

"Yondeh's the Gran' Terre light," he observed presently through a cloud of acrid smoke. "We're in Barataria Bay now. Gran' Isle's 'bout a coupla points oveh theah to sta'bo'd. We'll be landin' in 'bout an houah mo'."

DOWN the rough ladder Bruce climbed. In the bow, a little apart from the others, he found Armaid Santiney, gazing

out across the black waters toward the twinkling Grand Terre light. He sat beside her on a coil of rope.

"Feel better for the pine oil—and the sleep?" she asked.

"Pine oil was fine. The sleep can wait," said he.

Neither spoke for a moment. Then:

"What's all this Paxton business, anyway, Miss Santiney?" he asked abruptly.

There was nothing of the sudden start he had expected. She looked at him soberly in the dim light of the swinging deck-lantern.

"You poor boy!" she said. "What a beastly shame you've been tangled up in all this."

"You were going to tell me something about it tomorrow," he reminded her. "Do you mind ringing up the curtain now? There's a lot I don't understand, naturally."

"Ring up the curtain?" She hummed a bar or so from "Il Pagliacci." "Then you're the audience?" she smiled. "Hadn't you better stay on the *Héloise* and go back to town with her? There's nothing much except trouble if you 'take up our quarrel with the foe.'"

"Suppose you take me into the cast," he grinned. "A perfectly good little cruiser is a pretty high price to pay for just a ticket to watch the show," he pursued. "You know, they sank it—those loving little playmates of Paxton's."

ONCE more was he to be surprised. "Did you know that you really have me to thank for that loss?" she asked.

"What?"

"Oh, I can't tell you how sorry I've been," she said. "For a while this afternoon I thought that you were Paxton himself. You're both about the same build and coloring. Your cruisers might have been sister boats. They're not an uncommon type. And then when I learned through the glasses that you weren't the man we were watching for, I tried so hard to reach Nolde and Fabre in time. But I missed them in the dark."

"I'll say this for Nolde and Fabre, whoever they are," said Bruce. "Nobody can accuse them of missing anything in the dark. Those boys both ought to qualify as sharpshooters."

"They're two mighty loyal boys," said she. "They faced a fairly good chance of death tonight, they thought. But they

didn't flinch. They went gladly to drive out of the swamp a man they were pledged to my father not to kill. He was bound by no pledge. And killing is nothing new to him."

"Happy little land," thought Bruce to himself. "Now, why does Papa Etienne make his men stay hands off on this killer Paxton, whom I honor by resembling?"

A DECISION, half-formed in his mind, suddenly crystallized. Here was a game of shrouded mysteries, fine loyalties, strange and undreamed characters, set in a land that was all its own. He had been dealt a hand. Why not play it out?

"I'm staying for the dance tomorrow," said he, "and with your permission, Miss Santiney, I'm staying for whatever comes afterward."

"For whatever comes afterward?" she repeated after him, questioningly. The words seemed to have deep significance, somehow.

"If any kind of an alibi is needed for my presence," he suggested, "you might see that I get a job on one of these shrimp-platforms or luggers of your father's."

"Rough work," she smiled. Had the lantern-light been less dimmed, he would have seen how strained was the smile.

"I look rather rough myself." His eyes took in that costume of his. "And,"—with mock obsequiousness,—"I'm young and strong and want to grow up with the country, ma'am."

"So young and so ambitious," she mocked too, catching at the mood. "What a future awaits you!"

The hoarse wheeze of the *Héloise's* siren rasped through the air.

"Here we are at Grand Isle," she cried, springing to her feet.

All about them the ladies of the *Héloise's* prettiest cargo were coming to life. Lights twinkled ashore. Slowly the groaning old packet warped her way to the twin beacons that marked the farthest shoreward she could come in the wide, shallow waters of the Bayou Goula landing. A gentle bump—the anchor splashed down in the shelving channel.

A huge, hairy face, grotesque in the lantern-light, stared placidly at Bruce from a few feet outboard across the thwart.

"Great Scott! What's that?" he gasped. "Looks like a mule's head!"

The laughter of Armaid Santiney rang silver clear.

You *are* new to our country, aren't you," rippled her amusement. "I quite forgot how new. It is a mule. The water's too shallow here for anything but pirogues, outside the channel, so the *Héloise's* passengers are taken ashore in mule-carts."

Beside them stood ol' man Cap'n Didier. "Yo'd betteh bunk on bo'd th' *Héloise*, son," said he. "No hotel on Gran' Isle. These folks all puttin' up with frien's, an' it's pretty late to scout fo' a place fo' yo'. Blankets an' an extra mosquito-bar up in the texas."

"Thanks, Cap'n. That's fine." Bruce wheeled. "I'll see you then, certain-sure, at the dance tomorrow night?"

Armaid nodded brightly as with wide, free step she swung aboard the mule-cart.

"Don't forget your dancing-kit at Boulou Lafont's sto'," she called. And she was gone.

"See *her* at the dance!" Ol' man Cap'n Didier was grinning broadly. "Son, yo'll see eve'body fo' a hundred miles up an' down the coast at that dance. We're sorteh dancin' fools down heah when we get that fiddleh."

BRUCE woke with a start. The stars were gone. The eastern sky was a glory of crimson. His shoulder was being shaken by a huge black hand. Niggeh Jim stood beside him in the texas a steaming cup of black coffee filtering fragrance through the bar.

The day of the dance had dawned.

Presented at Boulou Lafont's sto' by ol' man Cap'n Didier, he had given one look at the kampus-kut styles—and compromised on a red flannel shirt, blue denim trousers and the least knobby-toed of the footwear. Boulou himself, in his elaborate courtesy, made up for any lack in his stock of goods. Praising that shirt's flaming dye, the queer little sleepy merchant cut short his embarrassed explanation of his accident and lack of funds.

"Any time, seh," said he. "Fix it up when yo' get back to the city. Any frien' of ol' man Cap'n is all right with me."

Through hours of the drowsy South Coast day he lounged about on the sto' gallery, presented to group after group of the shy, soft-spoken island folk, who made their small purchases and then stood around gossiping endlessly. Ol' man Cap'n had gone. The *Héloise* had moved over to Bayou Goula platform, loading her cargo of barreled, sun-dried shrimp in the space

vacated by the ladies, the lumber and the 'lasses.

He sat at table with Boulou that noon, listening with sheer delight to the philosophy of the man who ran his sto' on a joyously care-free lack of system that let his customers raid his shelves at will and figure out their own accounts. It was a strange new world.

Out on the gallery after dinner they sat and smoked and talked endlessly. Boulou's pleasant, droning monologue was interrupted for a space, as up the road came a blue-overalled, barefoot figure with a big basket pendant from an arm.

"Terrapin," said Boulou, reaching lazily into his hip pocket. He produced a worn steel scale and waited patiently while the figure trudged up from the beach road to the gallery steps.

Solemnly the overalled one produced the diamond-backs and submitted them to the measuring scale, one by one.

"Yo' got fo'teen dollahs an' six bits comin' to yo' fo' this lot, Boudreaux," pronounced Boulou. "Drop 'em in the pen, will yo'. Yo'll fin' the cash in a box in the right-hand top draweh o' my desk."

"Reckon I'll prowl roun' the shelves," chose Boudreaux. "Need a few things, Boulou."

"He'p yo'se'f, boy. Got some right fine new slicke's in stock."

And then Boulou noted Bruce's amazed face.

"Yo' city fellehs neveh can' get used to ouah way o' doin' business," he complained. "Thinkin' somebody's goin' to cheat a'ways. Sma't drumme's keep a-tellin' me I'll lose my eyeteeth. Still doin' business. Theah still wo'kin' fo' somebody else; an' I done bought me a fine new gazzoline this yeah. What's use us folks cheatin' each otheh down heah? An' if I hadda watch eve'body, I'd get no time fo' talkin' with frien's."

Presently emerged Boudreaux, the fine new slicke' over one arm, an assorted bundle of canned goods in the other hand.

"Had uh dolla' two bits comin' to me," said he. "Fine plundeh, this, Boulou."

And he stepped over to the terrapin-pen to add his lot to the hundreds of diamond-backs that awaited their destiny in the soup-kettles of a banqueting North.

"Get yo' dolla' two bits?" called Boulou.

"Uh-huh! In the draweh. Say, yo' betteh tell Miss Armaid that felleh Paxton's gazzoline done come hellin' outa Gran'

Bayou 'bout noon today. Headed down the Pass by the ol' fort."

Down the road to the boat-landing shuffled Boudreaux.

BRUCE affected elaborate unconcern.

"Who's this Paxton, Boulou?" he drawled, striving to suppress all sign of more than the most superficial of casual interest.

"Felleh bought out the Bassa Bassa shrimp-platfo'm 'bout a yeah ago," volunteered Boulou. "Pete Paxton's, his name. Sho' is a ha'd *hombre*. He an' some o' his men don' been foolin' a lot roun' ol' Fort Livingston, too."

"Fort Livingston?"

"Oh, jus' a ol' wreck of a fort been theah on Gran' Terre since the thirties."

Followed a detailed description of the old ruins of the brick fortification whose moldering walls yet stood, monument to the days when the Government guarded Baratara Pass.

"S'pose we have some coffee," said Boulou.

They dripped it over a charcoal brazier. Bees hummed soothingly in the fig trees. Grand Isle was wrapped in its afternoon calm. They slept.

At last came nightfall.

"Sho' yo' look all right fo' the ball," said Boulou as they woke from their doze and smoked a pre-supper cigarette while the fantastically colored sky gleamed through the clump of fig-trees. "Be some sto' clo'es theah, but not enough to bother yo'."

Borne softly on the south wind blowing in from the Gulf came the strains of music as they finished supper.

"Sta'tin' right quick," opined Boulou. "S'pose we mosey oveh."

They moseyed—through winding paths, past cauliflower and cucumber patches, pocket-handkerchief size, whence Grand Isle sends her "garden truck" to Northern markets. There are no roads in that drowsy paradise. Mule-carts in their broad-gauge majesty take the beach.

High-pitched wail of violin, thrum of guitar and banjo-strings, the droning of the Dutch irritator, all mingled oddly as they neared the rough plank structure of Chighizola Hall, named after one of the island's pioneers.

Inside, the light of oil lanterns, hung by nails from the splintery rafters, shone down on the uneven floor of mill-planed

boards, crowded with moving forms, slippery with the tallow of shaven candles. Here and there, as Boulou had foretold, gleamed white collars above creases of sto' clo'es. But in the main the rough flannel shirts and dark trousers, or the faded, oft-scoured blue denim of shrimpers, oystermen and fisherfolk loomed against the girls' festival white dresses. Splashes of color flamed in bright ribbons encircling uncorseted waists or woven intricately into masses of blue-black hair.

With a clatter of heavy boot-soles in the final spirited prance as the music died, the number came to an end. There she was! The same spirited, sun-tanned little face with the soft black hair, silken fine, piled high above it, gay with a crimson ribbon. But the stained khaki had been discarded. A girlish frock of white clung to the lithe figure. The stout little brown boots and heavy woollen stockings had given place to silken ankles and pumps.

SHE came forward on the arm of a courtly, white-haired man, who bowed from the hips on presentation.

"Doctor Aristide Jaudet, Mr. Armitage," she said. And then swiftly in apology: "I know you're looking reproachfully at my finery. Borrowed plumes! Do you know, his daughter Felicienne insisted on decking me out in her own purple and fine linen! I wouldn't for worlds have gone back on my word to you that I was coming in last night's costume, but numbers overpowered me. The whole vote of Maison Jaudet was against me. In the end I always have to do what Doc' Aristide says. He ushered me into this charming world, and he's been bossing me ever since, brutally."

So she remembered that she had told him she was coming to that dance in the khaki in which they first met! Bruce's heart leaped unaccountably.

For a moment they chatted common-places. Then with a gleeful cry of welcome Armaid, looking out past Bruce's shoulder, sped toward the door, where a smiling group massed about a small and wiry figure in the black robe and brazen crucifix, worn thrust into his girdle, that is the mark of the Oblate Fathers.

"Father Duchassois!" she cried. "I didn't know the mission boat was even on this part of the coast."

The sunburnt little missionary priest, whose parish was spread over half a

thousand miles of coastal marshes, greeted her warmly. Arm linked in hers, he walked back to where Bruce and Dr. Jaudet still stood.

"I'm glad to find you here, Armaid," he was saying as they neared. "Where is your father? My boat came in less than an hour ago. While we were mooring, Paxton came up in his cruiser. I hear he is looking for Etienne. I sense trouble."

"Papa has been away in St. Louis contracting for the trappers' fur-catch," she said. "We expect him back any time. You're right about the trouble. But I forget my manners. Father Duchassois, this is Mr. Bruce Armitage. And I'll tell you a secret. He's going to start work tomorrow at our Manila Village platform."

The little priest looked keenly at Bruce. "I am glad you are here in Etienne's absence," said he. "You may be needed, my son."

As Bruce stared at him, blankly puzzled, from the far end of the hall sounded preliminary twangings of the strings.

"If your card isn't full, Miss Santiney—" began Bruce.

"Card?" Her brows arched. "At Gran' Isle dances, m'sieur, a card is like the fabled hippogriff. It simply aint. But the dance is yours. I saved it for you. We must humor the whims of our trusted employees, you know. You're going back with me to Manila Village platform tonight, and you're reporting for work in the morning. I took you at your word, you see. The platform-boss has taken you on my recommendation. Old Placide Naccari! He's a dear. Aren't you in a pickle if you didn't mean it?"

Away they swung to the strains of an old-time waltz. She danced like wind-blown eiderdown.

"This," he breathed, "will be the first time I ever reported for work in my dancing-clothes."

"Lots of 'first times' happen to newcomers in bayou-land," she said.

"They do indeed," he answered with sudden warmth.

BUT she gave him no chance to follow up the opening.

"Tomorrow can't possibly be the first time you ever reported for work in your dancing clothes. Do you mean to tell me you never danced in uniform—never in all your army days?"

"How did you know I was in the army?"

he asked in surprise. "I never mentioned it."

"No, you never mentioned it," she said. "Nor did you even mention, Captain Armitage, that you came rather close to the middle-weight championship at the A. E. F. games."

He was mute from sheer astonishment.

"You see," she smiled, "our intelligence service down here is good."

"I'll say it's—" he began, when she broke in impetuously:

"Captain Armitage, we won't be mysterious any more. Let's walk out of the hall when this dance is over, and I'll tell you what must be puzzling you."

"Thank the Lord, that curtain's ringing up. But how on earth did you know about me?"

"Have you forgotten little Octo Santiney of your company, so soon? He was my brother. He wrote me often. He was at the University in Chicago when he enlisted. That's why I stared at you so when ol' man Cap'n Didier presented you. There aren't so very many Bruce Armitages in the world. It was marvelous. But I knew it must be you."

Swift recollection flooded through his brain.

"So that's where I'd heard the name Santiney before!" Surprise was topping surprise. "Poor Octo! We left him behind at the St. Mihiel show. And you're his sister!"

"It is rather stretching coincidence that we should blunder together, isn't it?"

"Here's to the blunder! Long may it wave!"

THE dance ended. Out into the starlit night they went, to where the long lines of the breakers foamed white as they thundered on the beach. Something of their wild music was singing in his blood.

"I'm almost at my wit's end!" She spoke with a sudden rush of words. "Let's begin at the beginning. It must be all such a puzzle to you. This man Paxton, months and months ago, bought the little Bassa Bassa shrimp-platform. But his shrimp operations were only a pretext. He's head of what's probably the most daring gang of liquor- and drug-runners in the South."

"No one down here minds liquor-running much. It's rather a good joke, they think. But the drugs! Ugh! Have you ever seen any of the boys in the army hos-

pitals, clean boys who had gone down to morphine? And cocaine? I have. I nursed, you know.

"And Paxton's gang have been running cocaine and morphine and heroin up from Mexico for months. They've had their shrimp business for a camouflage. They stored the stuff, when it had to be hidden, under the Bassa Bassa platform and in the ruins of old Fort Livingston. By night they've run it up through the swamps and bayous to New Orleans. Nolde and Fabre have seen enough while watching them to learn pretty thoroughly what's up.

"Paxton came to my father, who's rather a power down here on the coast, with a partnership proposal. Father was rough, I'm afraid. Paxton went to the hospital. He made some nasty threats. I was included in them. You see, I run around down here pretty foot-loose. I've done it ever since I was a baby.

"Then one of our motorboats vanished. It was stolen from its mooring at Manila Village one night. Folks don't steal down here on the coast. Everybody knows everybody else. We couldn't understand.

"We found out, though. Somebody telephoned to the Government men that a launch-load of drugs was to be run up through Barataria Pass one night. They laid in wait. The launch came along. The Government men were right on its trail, when the two men in it beached the boat on the marsh and disappeared.

"That was Father's missing boat. It was lucky the Government men knew my father so well. There was a case of cocaine and morphine in the cabin. It didn't cost much in Mexico, where it was bought. It was worth thousands to the 'dope-peddlers' in New Orleans.

"Father simply grew apoplectic with rage when he found this out," the girl went on. "He sent word to Paxton he would kill him if he ever found him down on the coast. We're still pretty primitive down here, I suppose. Paxton sent back word that no dope-peddler could run him out of the shrimp business because he was a competitor. That's the stand he took when the Government men questioned him, we learned.

"Then Father had to go to St. Louis about that fur-contract. Before he left, he pledged his men not to touch Paxton if he came here. He'd attend to him himself, he said. And those men would think a long time before they disobeyed him.

"Then Nolde and Fabre saw lights last week over in the ruins of Fort Livingston, late one night. The place is deserted. They paddled over silently in their pirogue, and listened to Paxton's men.

"The man is desperate. He has made threats against Father and against me. Father's not here. I've sent a man by boat to New Orleans to telegraph him. There isn't a wire down here for a hundred miles, you know.

"Nolde and Fabre and I knew his cruiser was at New Orleans. We planned to drive him back. We were watching for him that time those two boys mistook you for him, as I nearly did. Your cruisers are almost identical."

THERE was a brief pause.

"And now," said she, "he's here at Grand Isle. And Father's away. I'm so afraid, Captain Armitage. He's dead, that man—deadly."

Her voice was vibrant with emotion. And then, suddenly, she was no longer the steel-strung, poised and daring maid who braved the tangled swamp waterways in a paper-thin pirogue, but an overwrought, frightened girl, strained past bearing. She sank on the white sands of the Grand Isle beach, a huddled heap of white, shaking with sobs.

Awkwardly Armitage sat beside her. His arm went out instinctively about her shaking shoulders. Her head nestled for a moment against the rough flannel shirt that was the pride of Boulou Lafont's store.

"There—there!" he comforted her with masculinity's age-old phrase.

The slim shoulders slowly ceased their shaking. The tear-flushed face, piquant in the moonlight, peered up at him from beneath the tangled masses of her black hair's silken glory.

And then it happened.

With his heart beating wildly in his throat, Bruce bent forward. Their lips met and clung.

Both breathless, they looked at one another, silent, while the breaking rollers on the beach thundered their eternal call.

"You—you—don't happen to have a powder-puff in that marvelous shirt's pocket, do you? My nose is a shining sight!"

"A—a—powder-puff?" His consternation was comic.

They laughed together, with the swift reaction of youth.

"Armaid, you're a wonder," said he. "To think of you going out into the swamp in that pirogue to do battle! But the weight's off your shoulders now. Let's go back to the court ball, my princess, and we'll see what we shall see. Thank the Lord I'm not bound by any promise to your father. We'll interview this Paxton person."

"Oh, please be careful, Bruce," said the girl.

"I'll be more than that. I'll be punctilious. I'll be meticulous. And I promise you I'll be thorough."

Back from the beach they went to that rough plank hall amid the wind-twisted live-oaks. The floor was still shaking to the rough romping of a two-step just ended. Through the unpainted doorway they stepped side by side. No knight of old ever rode past the barrier to charge down the lists with higher heart than Bruce Armitage as he entered that barn-like shack, now to him glorified.

And there was Paxton.

BRUCE did not need the sudden contraction of Armaid's grip on his arm to tell him. Across the few feet of boards that separated them the two men faced one another, Paxton coolly insolent, Bruce with the blood singing through his veins. Such men of Etienne Santiney's as were in the hall—and they comprised the most of the throng—stood silent, glowering at the newcomer. Bound by their word to leave him to their master, their fear of that hard-fisted lord of their domain overrode their hatred of his foe.

"Miss Santiney!" It was Paxton who neared and spoke. "I came to call on your father. Sorry to find he has been called away on unavoidable business." His tone made rankling insult of the words. "But that needn't bar us from the next dance, need it? Or would you prefer to sit it out? That seems your preference this evening."

Knowing what he now knew, Bruce paid fleeting tribute in his thoughts to the man's desperate audacity. Here was no slinking coward, whatever else his blame.

"Miss Santiney is neither sitting out nor dancing—with you," he said softly.

Face to face they stood at last. The resemblance between the two—and the differences—showed startlingly. Almost alike in height and build and coloring, both tanned brown, both lean and hardened by

outdoor life, they were magnificent physical specimens of men. But the clean boyishness of Bruce's face showed in vivid contrast with the cynic evil life had etched on Paxton's.

IN the tense and tautened moment as the men stood face to face, there was an expectant shuffling of feet by the door of Chighizola Hall. Up about the opening crowded a new group of men, hard-bitten faces that every man there present knew as Paxton's, from the Bassa Bassa platform.

Old Placide Naccari, boss of the Manila Village platform, leaned forward toward Bruce.

"M'sieur has no need to concern himself with these Bassa Bassa men. We will care for them. They will not interfere."

And then Paxton spoke.

"Enter the fair-haired young hero!" he sneered.

They stood, the center of the æons-old ring of the fighting pack. The girls of the dance had fluttered out. Armaid stood in a far corner, where she had been drawn by Doc' Aristide.

"Paxton," said Bruce, softly still, "I didn't know your brand of polecat lived. You'd have to lick me sooner or later if we ever met. Outside now?" And as he spoke, Paxton struck.

It was the ancient ring trick of the foul fighter who with the half-completed handshake of the opening round smashes home a vicious blow. Only the boxer's instinct in Bruce saw it coming, speeding swift at his jaw. Hardly perceptible was the movement of his head, but the blow glanced just above his ear. His own right flickered in like a dart of flame. His left followed instantly, the last ounce of his steel-taut hundred and sixty pounds behind it.

Paxton crashed to all-fours. But hardly had he landed before he sprang to his feet, face streaming crimson through the split lips. Poised and tense, his right swaying easily for the feint that was to be followed by another smashing left drive, Bruce waited the onrush. It never came. His face glaring murderously, Paxton stopped in mid-stride, his hands falling to his sides.

Bruce half-wheeled, expecting he knew not what trick.

Behind him stood Father Duchassois. But the little priest was transformed. His flowing black robe, the brass crucifix still

thrust in the sable girdle, had all the swirl of suddenly arrested motion men see in the lines of the Winged Victory. His mild blue eyes were icy-cold; yet they flamed with a chill joy of battle, heritage of generations of ancestors who had taken the field beneath the lilies of France.

And in his hands gleamed the blued steel of an automatic shotgun, the twelve-gauge muzzle pointing at Paxton's midriff. Up and down the South Coast men knew Father Duchassois as a mighty hunter. His fingers caressed dark wood and darker metal with the smooth certainty of the man who knows his weapon.

Clear and incisive, vibrant with repression, sounded his voice that all there had heard thunder from the little stained wooden pulpit of the Chapel of Our Lady of the Isle.

"My son, you and your godless crew will have the goodness to march to the boat-landing and leave Grand Isle for the present. I would be a poor shepherd of my flock did I permit you to carry through your evil designs, knowing what I know."

NOT a man who heard those words but knew that the little priest would back them to the utmost. Not one of them, even had he not known, would have dared do other than take his orders after one glimpse of that yawning muzzle and the face above it.

Paxton, his lips puffed and swelling, his rage-white face crimson-splotted, waved back his men.

"On board!" he ordered curtly.

He centered his slitted gaze on Bruce.

"There's more to this," said he.

"Good third-act stuff," commended Bruce. "It's your move."

"My patience," broke in Father Duchassois, "is great. But it is getting somewhat strained."

"The Church must have its way—when it takes to lay weapons, Father," said Paxton, moving to the door. "Does that twelve-gauge usually supplement your crucifix?"

"Possibly, my son," said Father Duchassois sweetly, "in the education you have so misapplied, you have heard of the Church militant. This is it."

And shotgun in hand, he escorted Paxton on board.

The hall was a buzz of talk when he returned. All thought of dancing had been forgotten.

"Ho, Gombe Pelant," Father Duchassois called to one of the islanders who stood near by. "Here is your gun. You must pardon me that I entered your house next door and took it without permission."

Gombe took the proffered weapon. He shot back the slide and looked within. Then he glanced at the little priest and grinned widely.

"It would have been of more use, *mon père*," said he, "had you thought to load it."

"It was loaded." Father Duchassois himself was grinning whimsically. "But I feared that the Church militant might become too militant. You will find the shells on your kitchen table."

Homeric laughter shook the hall. Here was a jest Grand Isle would cherish for generations.

"The wicked flee, my children, even when an empty gun pursueth," was the little priest's misquoted and final contribution.

No dance on earth could have survived that swift swirl of events. To cottage and boat trooped the crowd along the narrow Grand Isle paths. Their soft voices and laughter sounded through the night.

Hand in hand, like two children, Armaid and Bruce walked down the white shell road to the boat-landing where lay moored the Manila Village luggers. Out into the dark waters they rolled behind a patient mule, boarded one of the stout little craft, and went forward to the bow, immemorial place for those with much to say to each other.

CLEAR and clean the new-washed day was shining when Bruce stepped from the doorway of his bunk-house on the Manila Village platform next morning. Great lungfuls of the salt air he drew in, stretching his arms lazily. It was great, simply great, just to be alive on a day like this. What would Paxton pull now? "There's more to this," he had said, before he vanished into the darkness of the night before.

Anyway, Armaid's worries were over. Whether old Etienne appeared or not, he was there. Lord, what a wonder girl!

She stood before him. Shy was her morning greeting, an adorable shyness after his memory of the self-reliant young pirogue-paddler who, gun in hand, dared the depths of swamps that to him were shrouded mysteries.

Deep in the pools of her brown eyes he looked, and knew that however swift and tempestuous the wooing, however primitive and unconventional the winning, this slender girl spelled all of womanhood for him through the years to come.

"Armaid—" said he, his voice trembling a little.

But with gay elusiveness she slipped from the grip of his mood of high romance.

"Sir Knight Errant," said she brightly, "you are now in your lady's service. And here at Manila Village the day's service starts—with ham and eggs. Follow me."

With light step she headed for the white-painted quarters that were office and home of old Etienne Santiney. A white-jacketed Filipino boy was setting the table in the sunlit little breakfast-room.

In the comparative dimness of the hallway his hands clasped her shoulders and turned her about. His arms were around her. Her soft lips were crushed to his.

"Ah, Bruce—dearest!" She had thrust herself back in his grasp. "Slowly, boy of mine. It's so wonderful. And I think this sort of thing only comes once. Let's not crowd our happiness."

THEY sat them down to breakfast.

"Your first day's work will be heavy," she smiled. "I'll show you all about and you'll do some strenuous listening."

Which proved to be the program. Like a child showing all its beloved toys to a youthful visitor, Armaid led him about the place. Her swift little motorboat, with its businesslike arms-rack in the white enameled cabin; her pirogue, brought back by the lumbering old *Héloise* that morning; her baby grand piano, barged down from the city—"it has to be tuned about once a month; this climate simply plays havoc with the strings;" her books and music and her boyishly complete kit of fishing tackle—all these passed in review. And ever the sun climbed higher while the big shrimp-caldrons boiled and the windrows of the tiny product were spread out to dry. About them worked the platform crew, weather-beaten men of all nations.

After luncheon, as they sat on the bay-fronting gallery of the living quarters, and all about them seemed steeped in drowsy peace, sounded a hoarse call in Bruce's ears.

"Hy-ah, yo' bullies! Shake a leg! Dancin'-time!"

He turned to Armaid in wonderment.

"Dancing-time?"

"Of course. The shrimp have to be danced."

"Don't impose too much on a tender-foot's credulity. What's this? 'Alice in Wonderland' stuff?"

"Nothing half so literary. When the shrimp are sun-dried, the shells get brittle in the heat, and the boiled shrimp get hard and resilient. So we rake them up in big rings, and the men in their heavy boots dance a quaint sort of shuffle over them. That breaks the shells, and they scoop them up in big shovels and screen them through wire screens. But come on. You can see it while I'd only have it half-described."

OUT into the glare of the mid-afternoon sun they went, to where the great platform shimmered in the heat. Before Bruce's astounded eyes there shuffled toward a great ring of sun-dried shrimp a group of men from that hard-bitten platform crew. On twin buckets upside down sat two of the crew with banjo and accordion. They struck up a weird minor refrain.

Hands on hips, in utter solemnity, the shrimp-dancers with their heavy-soled sea-boots shuffled round and round that circle of shrimp. Brittle shells popped beneath their tread.

"Ah gotta Elgin movement in ma' feet wit' a twenty-yeah guahanteee!" sang one dolefully in time to twanging banjo strings.

It seemed indescribably comic to Bruce. Loud and long he laughed.

"Suppose you try it," smiled Armaid. "It's rather a trick, at that."

Amid the grins of the platform crew, Bruce, hands on hips, swung into the dancing circle, that opened out to make room for him. It *was* rather a trick, he learned, after the first dozen shuffling steps on the glass-like slipperiness of the crackling shrimp-armor. Faster and faster went the music. Round and round swung the circling dancers. Then suddenly Bruce, his eyes fastened to the feet of the shrimp-dancer just ahead of him in the circle, trying hard to master that gliding shuffle, and thinking the while of the way he had seen the peasant girls of southern France tread out the grapes in wine-making time, bumped violently into the back of the platform man.

The music had come to a swift stop.

Laughingly he looked up at Armaid

where she stood, a few feet away. Her face was a mask of frozen horror. He wheeled and looked about him.

There, lounging easily, an evil grin on his face, stood Paxton. Ranged about him were his men of the Bassa Bassa platform, armed to the last of the hard-boiled crew.

"Quite the little dancing demon, aren't you?" Paxton's lips were smiling, but his eyes were chill flints of malignant hate. And his face was still swollen from the blow of the night before. "Social dancing by night. Shrimp-dancing by day. We'll see now if you're as good with your hands as you are with your feet."

"You seem to have brought along plenty of artillery to back you up if they're too good for you," taunted Bruce.

"Round 'em up!" curtly commanded Paxton, glancing at his Bassa Bassa gang. With threatening gun-muzzles they obeyed. Simmering with rage, the Manila Village crew huddled to one side, helpless, under armed guard.

"Now come out here and we'll finish what we started last night," said Paxton to Bruce.

"Just a minute, before the show starts," said Bruce. "This looks like one of your sort of heads-I-win-tails-you-lose propositions. If you can put me out, of course you and your gunmen can put over what you've started. But you can do it anyway. Why take the licking you've got coming to you when you're holding four aces?"

"That needn't worry you. But I might as well make you happy while you're still able to hear me. After our little party the fair Armaid and I are going for a cruise, no matter how this comes out. But it's only coming out one way; so get ready to take what's coming to you like a little man. When Etienne started to juggle with me I told him he was playing with dynamite. He'll get his pet daughter back if he behaves—maybe. But you butted in. So you're holding a ticket for the licking of your meddlesome young life. That's all you need bother your head about."

ON platform and bayou along the South Coast, in pirogue and lugger, over the coffee-braziers on the galleries of many a swamp-land "sto'," for months thereafter men talked little else than the fight that followed.

In Paxton had been born the caution for lack of which he had paid the price in his

Grand Isle humiliation before his crew. Hardened in the rough-and-tumble of the South Coast and the city underworld, he set about systematically to batter Bruce to a pulp. Here there need be no haste. His Bassa Bassa gunmen held the upper hand. And his victories in uncounted clashes of his world had bred a cold confidence that had carried him far.

But in Bruce, too, coupled with his clean sportsmanship in the world of the gloved amateur, was the deadly training of those silent clashes with trench-knife and pistol-butt in the dark of No Mafi's Land, where a sound was followed by a bursting star-shell and the sinister chatter of the machine-guns that knew no rules of odds or fair play.

It was hopeless, he felt from the start. Were he to knock out Paxton in their first swift and thudding contact, he would only release the gunmen for whatever task their orders bade. If he were to go down beneath Paxton's rush, the result would be the same. With all his ring-craft he set about the task of prolonging that fight to the utmost. Therein, he felt, was the only chance that might bring some new development whereby Armaid could be saved.

Something might happen while they fought—something that would swing the balance of power from the hands of that hard-bitten crew, something that would give Armaid a chance to escape. He glanced swiftly about him. There she stood, on the outskirts of the Manila Village men, with a glowering, swarthy Bassa Bassa man, pump-gun resting easily in the crook of his arm, only a few feet from her.

Then came Paxton's rush. All else thereafter centered on his one task to prolong that fight.

COOLLY be blocked and ducked and stepped from side to side. Methodically he smashed home blow after blow, "pulling" the force of his punches lest by chance he should knock out his man. Yet ever was the haunting fear that Paxton might divine his game—might force the issue whereby he must win or lose in some crashing exchange of toe-to-toe slugging. And if he won, Armaid lost.

Their heavy boots clattered on the worn platform floor. The thud of blows, some blocked, some driven home, sounded through the breathless silence of the South Coast afternoon. Scarcely a word was

said. Tense, strained, leaning forward with slitted eyes, the men of Bassa Bassa and Manila alike drank in every motion of that epic fight of the Coast. Paxton was fighting silently, malignantly, with cold venom as he strove to disfigure the face that moved ever just beyond his reach, in the shimmering heat-haze of the South Coast afternoon. His own face was puffed and bleeding where Bruce's steady left jab flickered in time after time, yet never with knockout force.

There was a sudden hiss of indrawn breath from those watching men. With fierce rush, hammering at the body, Paxton had closed with Bruce, boring in with head held low. Desperately Bruce fought to break free from that deadly clinch. His hard leather boot-soles grated on some crackling bodies of the sun-dried shrimp in their brittle, glassy armor. His feet flew from beneath him. Down he went, with Paxton on top, raining vicious blows upon his face.

This was the end, Bruce thought dizzily. All memory of what he was fighting for, even, had left him. There was nothing in all earth or sea or sky but a coldly malignant face and the blows that ripped and hammered home. Mechanically he hugged his foe to him, to keep him from the free arm-swing that gave such deadly force to those stunning smashes.

WITH a last great tensing of all his powers, Bruce tore free one arm, drove in a thudding punch that rocked Paxton with pile-driver force, broke loose and staggered to his feet. His head was whirling. Scarcely could he see the man who in front of him was lurching to his feet. In his ears, above the drumming of the pulsing blood, sounded a sharp command.

"Hands up!"

Came a rippling crackle of shots.

Into his clouding memory sped the thought of those Bassa Bassa gunmen. They'd cut loose, then. Well, it was over. Missed him, had they. One more crack at Paxton for luck before they got him. Rotten shooting.

Into the range of his vision loomed his enemy's face as Paxton's battered figure, streaming blood from every puffing feature, straightened to its feet before him. All else but this had left him utterly. His own bleeding lips curled in the fighting snarl that is the heritage of the pit-

dog's last lurch toward the line past which he sees his foe.

One more crack.

With fast-glazing eyes he measured his distance, tensed—and swung.

"No pulling that punch," he mumbled, swayed as he watched the limp body crash and sprawl to the platform floor, glimpsed one vision of marsh and bay and skyline swirling about him—and toppled sprawling above the body of the man he had knocked out.

A NIAGARA of cold water was cascading about Bruce's face as he swam back through illimitable blackness. Bent above him was Armaid, her brown eyes gazing into his as they slowly opened.

"It's all over, laddy-boy," she whispered. His bruised and aching arms went up around her neck. Her soft lips were touching his puffed and battered face.

"Here! Here! None of that!"

Bruce rose shakily to his feet. Before him stood a rock-hard, stocky figure in white, topped by a Panama of enormous width of brim.

"You're a handsome young Beau Brummel to be kissing a young lady in public with a face like that," growled the Panama-topped one. "Armaid, suppose you present your unconventional friend."

"This," said Armaid demurely, "is Captain Bruce Armitage. And I'm going to marry him. Bruce, this is Daddy."

Extending a knuckle-skinned hand, Bruce felt slowly of his nose, which had a decided list to starboard—of his lips, which were assuming altogether too prominent a rôle to suit him. And then he grinned lopsidedly.

"Hello," said he.

The impassive face of Etienne Santiney crinkled in one of the few grins South Coast history records.

"Young man," quoth he, "I like your nerve. But above all else I must praise you for your judgment."

Up to them stepped one in the trim blue and gold of the nation's Customs Service. He gripped and pump-handled Bruce's wincing hand.

"Great work, old man!" said he. "Great work! I'm Inspector St. Ceran of the Customs. We've made a real round-up, this time."

"My Filipino boy is something of an amateur first-aid horse-doctor," broke in Etienne. "Suppose we defer the decora-

tions until you get cleaned up and patched a little."

AN hour later, washed, bandaged, plastered with surgeon's tape, clad in the rough platform garb taken from the stock of the little sto', Bruce sat on the gallery looking out over the flaming sunset that dyed the waves of Barataria Bay in the same gorgeous colors of the western sky.

There he heard the tale of Etienne's swift trip from St. Louis, when Armaid's telegram reached him; of his brief stop in New Orleans to pick up the Customs men when Nolde and Fabre met him there with their report of the drug-cache they had discovered on the Bassa Bassa platform and hidden in the subterranean vaults of Fort Livingston's ancient wreckage; of their swift trip down the bayous in Etienne's cruiser; and of their arrival at Manila Village just in time to see the finish of the fight with Paxton.

"And I'll say, young man, it was some finish!" quoth Daddy Etienne. "Those Bassa Bassa men were just locking my crew up in my storage-shed when we came up the wharf. Had to do a little shooting to round 'em up. These Customs uniforms helped some, I reckon. Then we saw you win the bayou championship belt and went out to pick up four of the Bassa Bassa men who had started off in Paxton's cruiser."

"Long chase?" asked Bruce.

"Not long. Juan, this Filipino boy, slipped out while you and Paxton were swapping love-taps and looped a small hawser round the shaft just forward of the screw. They went about twenty yards, I guess, before it fouled, and they waited for us to pick 'em up."

"About forty thousand dollars' worth of drugs in tins under the cabin floor," supplemented Inspector St. Ceran jubilantly. "I reckon this busts Paxton's show higher than the altitude record. He'll do indoor exercises at Atlanta for a while, or I'm a liar."

OUT of the Gulf of Mexico rose the silver splendor of the South Coast moon. Arm in arm Armaid and Bruce walked from the gallery out past the storage-shed where Paxton and his men lay, waiting next day's trip to New Orleans with ol' man Cap'n Didier and the *Héloise*, who was long to tell of that famous passer-list.

Down the long board-walk of the wharf they went, to its far outer edge. For a while they sat in silence. Far out on the silver reaches of Barataria Bay, like quaint Japanese prints against the shining glory of the moon, loomed squat and black the low hulls and stubby spars of three lugger trawls, heading for home. Coffee-fires in the charcoal braziers on their aft-decks twinkled like tiny rubies through the night. Faint and far-off came the *put-put-put* of their "gazzolines" urging them onward.

"It's sheer wonderland," said Bruce. "Who wants to go back to cities—for a while, anyway?"

"We'll be married by Father Duchas-sois down at Grand Isle in that little Chapel of Our Lady of the Isle." Armaid was speaking softly, her hand in his. "And for the wedding-trip, we'll take my little cruiser way round out Timbalier way. It's most wonderful at nightfall down there in the lee of the island, with the great old Gulf singing to you, and the red eye of the Timbalier light glowering at you through the dark like a grouchy Cyclops. And there's the dearest old trapper lives over by Grand Cailloux. You'll love him. He taught me more about hunting! And Bruce, we'll cruise up Terrebonne Bayou past the old, old plantations, and stop and chat with the most wonderful people! You do like my country, don't you?"

"Sounds mighty fine to me, Armaid," said he. "But there's one thing you've got to show me pretty soon. Got any shoats on the place?"

"Shoats?" Armaid's brow wrinkled in puzzlement. "Why, everybody has 'em more or less, where there's enough dry land. But why do you want to see a shoat?"

"Wanted to take one out to a nice, oozy bayou bank and turn him loose and watch him."

"But why, goose?"

"Oh, I just wanted to see if those Cajun poets knew their business. Remember that song you sang when we were plowing south on the old *Héloise*? '*Mo l'aimin to comme cochon aimin la boue.*' 'I love you as the little pig loves the mud.' Remember? I've got a hunch that simile isn't half strong enough."

Silence again, while the silvery softness of the rising moon shone about them. But the man in that moon didn't even blink an eye-lash. He's been seeing that sort of thing on the South Coast for a long, long time.



Leatherbee's Luck

*A quaint little romance of business life by the author of
"Bennington's Boy" and many other attractive stories.*

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

"IT'S no use, Talby," Geneva Carbury insisted. "I admit I like you awfully well, but I can't marry you, and you know why."

"On account of your business, same as usual?" demanded Talbot Sears as they hiked along the serpentine path round the Reservoir.

"Yes, I'm attached to it, and—"

"So's a convict attached to his business, when he's in the chain-gang with an iron ball riveted to his leg. That's no way to live! You can't go on this way, Geneva. What's a can-opener-manufacturing concern, compared to love?"

"Lots!" Her dark-brown eyes, which sometimes danced with laughter, now looked quite tragic and determined. "I've got to make a success of my business before I can think of trying to make a success of love. If I let Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, die, how could I ever be a successful wife to you? I just couldn't!"

"Nonsense!" He slashed at the autumn leaves along the path with the stick in his gloved hand. She tilted up her chin, rather adorably.

"Thank you!" she answered.

"Oh, I—I don't really mean that, you know," he hedged. "I didn't mean to be rude, and all that, but—"

"It's all right, Talby; but I've got to make good, first."

"Yes, and if you don't? Hang it all, Geneva, isn't my profession grinding out enough for two?"

"Oh, yes. But I didn't take that commercial-efficiency course just to let my father's business die in less than two years after he died himself. That business is all the memorial he ever wanted. He built it up for me, willed it to me and told me to carry on. And now you want me to drop it?"

"And marry me. Sure thing! And be my partner. Why not?"

SHE shot at him one of those swift woman-glances that flash into a man's soul while the man himself is asking himself the color of a woman's eyes.

"No," she decided. "You're making a success of your game. I've got to, of mine. Will, too—when I get that improved

machinery and put through those patents. After Carbury Can-Cutters, Incorporated, is on a paying basis and I've got an independent income of my own, well,"—and she laughed shortly,—“maybe I'll offer you a partnership. Not till then. Now, let's talk about the weather.”

“THE whole situation is manifestly absurd,” Talbot complained to Robert Boardman, second, that night at the Circulatory Club. “Geneva's absurd too.”

“Any man thinks any woman's absurd when she wont have him,” Boardman affirmed. He slumped down angularly in the deep leather chair by the fireplace. “That's part of man's natural egotism. I never knew a fellow yet who ever heard about a man-hater without thinking that if she knew him—”

“None o' your cynicism! Geneva's not a man-hater, at all. It's only that her perference can-opening bug—”

“Loyalty to one's father isn't a bug.”

“Well—if she wasn't so infernally obstinate!”

“You're a fool to argue with a woman. Kiss her.”

“Can't be did.”

“So?” Boardman fitted another cigarette to his amber holder, and lighted up. “Interesting!”

“Oh, you can afford to be patronizing, all right. But if *your* girl—”

“Ah, but I married *my* girl two years ago. I got her by working a little judicious jealousy into her cosmos. That's good dope, Talby. Stay away from Geneva awhile. Let her miss you.”

“It wont work with her. She's up to her pretty ears in can-openers, and till she makes 'em succeed—which they never will in a thousand years—”

“By the end of which time neither of you will be much. Make it sooner, old man. Help her succeed, *pronto*. After that, she's yours. Simple, eh?” Boardman smiled dryly and blew smoke. “Boost her confounded can-openers. Then annex her. Slip me a few thousand, Talby, and I'll resuscitate the dry bones of her company's securities. I'll make live stock of 'em. Make her company a blooming success. Then you nab her—and there you are!”

Talbot shook a mournful head.

“Your advice is no good, Bob. I don't want a business woman for my wife, at all.”

“Well, then,” judged Boardman, “knife

her company. That's the only thing left to do. She'll have to admit defeat, and then she'll be yours. In a year she'll have forgotten there was ever such a thing in the world as a can-opener. She wont even have one in your happy kitchenette. Nothing but canned-goods with keys to 'em. Can Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated. That's the key to all your heartaches. Put the outfit on the blink.”

“There isn't much of an outfit to put,” said Talbot, his eyes approving. “Only Geneva and old Ezra Litchfield, her inherited factotum.”

“Cinch. Smear 'em!”

“Is it etiquette to smear the lady you're in love with?”

“Sure!” asserted Boardman. “It's done in the best circles. All's fair in love and war on can-openers.”

“It seems kind of a rotten thing to do,” hesitated Talbot, “but the ends justify being mean, and—”

“Being a broker, I'm a practical man. It's your only chance.”

“How can you work it? Got any idea?”

“I've got millions of ideas, Talby. Billions! That's what I live and move and have my beans on, is ideas. Now, in this particular case, I've got one of most particular brilliancy. Well?”

“Spill it!” commanded Talbot.

BOARDMAN smoked contemplatively. “Did you ever hear of such a thing as a natural, born, invincible hoodoo?”

“No—not seriously, that is. Of course, there's a lot of jokes about hoodoos, but—”

“I don't mean any joke-stuff at all. I mean the real, simon-impure article. I mean a hoodoo that crabs everything from cradle to grave. A hoodoo marked with the Black Spot of the Cosmic Swat. Ever know a man like that?”

“No,” replied Talbot. “It's all foolishness.”

“Not at all. Luck's a solid fact. Some people turn everything they touch into cash. Others would queer the City of Gold if they owned a single lot in Angel Avenue. Every broker knows it. They're marked men. Nobody will have 'em in their business. Most brokers wont even trade with 'em. It means ruin. Fact, old man!”

“By ginger, that's odd. But admitting it's a fact, what about it?”

“Lots. I know a hoodoo.”

“Well?”

"His name's Leatherbee—Jonah K. Leatherbee. He's done more failing and messed up more businesses than any living man. As a false alarm, he's sublime."

"How does this apply to Geneva and me?"

"I'll make it apply," promised Boardman. "Thing is, do you give me the go-ahead signal?"

"Rather—just so I get the girl."

"You're on," smiled the broker. "Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, is as good as dead already. I'll interview Leatherbee tomorrow."

"And what have I got to do?"

"Nothing—but order your wedding raiment. Get busy!" ..

BOARDMAN interviewed Jonah K. Leatherbee next afternoon. He found him in a shabbily furnished room on Parkland Street, third floor, back.

"Hello, Leatherbee," said he. "How's tricks?"

"Hopeful, as usual," Leatherbee replied. Leatherbee was a tall, asparagus-stalk-built man of forty-five, with mild blue eyes, stooped shoulders and an eyeshade. "I have several hens on. Even one hatching will fix me."

"That's good," smiled the wily broker, sitting down. "I've got a fine tip for you. It'll change your luck."

"Glad o' that!" smiled Leatherbee. "It could stand a lot of changing—like a thousand-dollar bill."

"I know. You never *have* connected right, have you?"

"Not perceptibly." Leatherbee folded himself in sections into a chair. "I know I'm a jinx, all right, but I'm long on hope."

"Is it true," Boardman asked, "that you've put your whole family on the blink?"

"Looks like it," admitted Leatherbee, who appeared human and liked to talk. "When I was born, Saturn was in conjunction with the Seven Veils of Jinx and in opposition to everything in my luck-line. My folks were comfortably well off, though not as well off as they had been. My influence went back, you see, and even hit my innocent old grandfather."

"Retroactive hoodooism, eh?"

"Something like that. Grandfather was worth a lot of money. He lost it in a big smash in the 40's and in Ohio land-speculation. His son—my father—piled up a bit of property, but missed millions when he

was in Chicago right after the big fire and didn't invest there. Instead, he invested in a couple of Western boom towns. Both booms busted. I figure I'm responsible, even though I hadn't been born then."

LEATHERBEE nodded, and lighted his pipe. Boardman asked:

"What then? I'd like to get your complete story, before I spill the tip I've got for you. After you personally arrived in this vale of tears, what happened to Saturn and the Pleiades?"

"Lots. But more happened to me. My father gave up the struggle and died, when I was only a youngster. A few days later our last piece of family property—a big brick block—was wrecked by a tornado. Then my brother and sister had to quit school, and we all struggled through soul-destroying shabby gentility—boarders, and all that. At five, I got a severe injury that made an outsider of me. You know how boys are, with a lame duck. I went in for study, as time passed, and did well. But when I graduated from high school and took a medal, I remember my only pants were patched with black velvet."

"Well," commented Boardman, "you can't say you never had any velvet in your life."

"Never any in my pocket. The velvet I refer to wasn't there, but more to the southward. After that, I wanted to go to college, but instead I went to a factory, where I got asthma, a mashed hand and nine dollars a week. Then my sister married a highly prosperous business man. Right away his place burned, and he took to booze and went nutty. For twenty years he hasn't earned a cent, and he's kept the family in hot water all that time."

"Hot water is a luxury, these days."

"This was boiling. I broke away and into college, did all kinds of work and made the grade. Graduated with an M. A. degree, a Phi Beta Kappa key, a debt of four hundred dollars and nervous prostration from doing my own work and other fellows' too—tutoring 'em, to help pay expenses. Just about that time my uncle, the only rich one in the family, had a tannery and a big general store. He got his hand chopped off in the tannery and lost his store in a panic. Uncle went in for politics and held a meeting in the tannery. Floor fell through, lot of people got hurt and Uncle had to pay damages. Besides that, the opposition slogan that, 'His platform

has fallen through,' defeated him at the polls. Then the tannery burned, and Uncle—he was about sixty—had to hunt a job. Saturn and I finished *him*, all right."

"I think you're going to be just the man I'm looking for," Boardman approved. "Anything else?"

"**R**ATHER!" smiled Leatherbee, through smoke. "My brother, a highly trained man, after twenty years' hard work for a very big concern, had his salary cut a thousand a year and was buried alive in a small branch office while a relative of the president of the company got his job. Then my Aunt Elvira met an army officer who got engaged to her daughter and sold the old lady about twelve thousand dollars' worth of gilt-edged securities. The officer turned out to be a fake and the securities all forged. Exit officer and kale. After that—"

"You'll do, Leatherbee. Now listen."

"Wait! I married, and right away after that developed T. B. Had to bury myself in the woods for several years, to save my life. I went through hell with my wife's relatives, who—well, weren't the kind of people one cares to know. I wanted a son, to help pull the family together. Of course, Saturn handed me a daughter. After that—"

"I did hear something about your getting a divorce."

"Yes. Draw the veils. Infidelity, drugs and alcohol don't make a pleasant story. The divorce cost me every penny I'd scraped together. At thirty-eight I had nothing left but a daughter with extravagant tastes. I continued to hustle, though. Went into an oil-company with good leases. Couple of days before I expected to clean up forty thousand dollars, some crooks wrecked the business. I got nothing. Later, tried oil again, in Oklahoma. Dry holes, every one."

"Now, the proposition I have in mind—"

"Hold on! I want you to get me right. I scraped up a little cash, bought a place in Cuba and went in for fruit. Hadn't been a cyclone in that town for seventeen years. The year after I started, a cyclone wrecked the place—backed up a river and flooded it, too. I lost my house and all my personal effects. Saturn and I put Las Palomitas on the eternal blink."

"You were in politics for a while after that, weren't you?"

"Yes. They ran me for Governor of a certain New England State, on a third ticket. I was defeated by the largest plurality ever given in the State. Then I undertook to edit a magazine, and the magazine died. I took to writing, but the soap in paper and costs cut down the book-market. I sold four movies; and right away the censorship K. O'd the business. Organized a movie-company of my own. It went blooey. I think if I'd gone into manufacturing coffins, Saturn would have stopped everybody dying."

"Why didn't you try that, Leatherbee, and become a great public benefactor?"

"No. Death's a sore subject with me, ever since my niece, that I was struggling to put through college, died suddenly."

"I see. Well—maybe it's been your own fault, some way. Bad habits, or—"

"I never drank or gambled, Boardman. I belong to no clubs and waste no time. I smoke nothing but this pipe. I've made as good a fight as I know how. But Saturn has always knifed me. Every winner I've ever picked has become a loser. And I've dragged down lots of other people, too—that is, Saturn and I have."

"You ought to have enlisted on the side of the Germans, in the war," smiled Boardman.

"I would have, if I could have got to Germany. I'd have done just that, as a patriotic duty. Then the Kaiser would have been licked in three weeks. I can turn my hand to about any old thing, and I can hustle; but I'm always sat on by Saturn. Every time I get to Good Luck Junction, the train's just gone. If I caught that train, it would be wrecked at the first switch. Get me right, Boardman. Before you spill your proposition, let me warn you if it's anything you're expecting to succeed, don't let me in on it."

"It isn't," said the broker. "It's something I'm expecting to fail. I want you to help me. Now, listen!"

GENEVA CARBURY, the desirable, came into the drab little office on South Exchange Street at ten minutes to nine, hung up her rain-cape and limpsy turban, and sat down at the old-fashioned black-walnut desk her father had once occupied. Old Ezra Litchfield, already pattering with file-boxes, gave her a solicitous good morning. In the gloom of that rainy, chill November day he squinted at her over his misty glasses.

"Well, what's on for today, Ezra?" the girl queried briskly.

"There's that Baxter note comin' due this noon," the old man mumbled. "An' Caldwell was in already, this mornin', to see about that bill. An' I got a phone-call, just after I swep' out, from Morrissey & Black. They say if we don't—"

"I wish you wouldn't bother me with unimportant details," interrupted Geneva severely. Old Litchfield was good as gold. Consistent goodness is, at times, extremely trying. This was one of those times. In three weeks Geneva had had no word from Talbot Sears; and indirectly she had heard that he had twice taken Kay Montgomery out in his car.

Geneva looked up from the pile of letters on her desk—an even slimmer pile than usual, which was saying much. She regarded the faithful retainer of the besieged fortress with some irritation. His old-fogy ways and his solicitude were thorns in her young, fair and eminently lovely feminine flesh. Her brown eyes narrowed at Litchfield. Very much indeed she wanted to replace him with a hustler, a man of intelligence and pep. But men like that cost money. And old Litch could be—and often had been—hung up for his salary.

"And then too," thought Geneva, "it's my duty to keep him. Father always did. But, oh!"

When it came to trials, though, Litch wasn't any more a trial than the out-of-date office equipment—or than the lamentable shares in Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, that nobody ever wanted to buy. And beside—but when Geneva let herself think about trials, why, there never came an end of them. So she only tightened her full lips, red as cinnabar, and turned back to the morning's mail.

Just the regulation thing, as per usual: "We are therefore returning the consignment—"

"Sorry to report that—"

"Kindly remit, or—"

"Regret that we cannot file your patent, in spite of its manifest excellence, until some further payment has been made on the bill now due—"

"Account overdrawn. Please deposit to cover, and avoid protest-fees—"

GENEVA laid down the mail, her pretty eyes dejected. A little of the November rain seemed to have got into them;

but perhaps that was only an optical illusion. Something very like a sigh, however, made old Litchfield glance up from his puttering. He shook his bald head.

"We can't go on much longer this way, Miss Geneva," said he. Ezra had known her since she was knee-high to a flounder, known her when she had used to come like a ray of June sunshine into that same shabby old office, and sit at the little side-table and cut out paper-lace with the office shears. So she never could be "Miss Thacher" to him. Nor could he hold back from her the griefs now corroding his withered but supremely loyal heart.

"We can't go on," he repeated. "Bank-balance at the Old Colonial is down to \$47.86; rent's overdue; an' Comerford wont accept any more manufacturin'-orders till we settle that last bill o' \$197.25. Not a stock-sale from McCallum & Rice in three months, an' how about that printin' bill for letterheads? I'm not sayin' a word about my pay, Miss Geneva, not one word! But this here typewriter's just got to be fixed up some way. It's all out o' kilter. Take that there letter *e*, for instance—"

"I know all about that letter *e*," she caught him up. Indeed she did know, only too painfully. She hadn't used that balky machine for months; she hadn't for weeks past doctored up that defective *e* with a pencil on every letter sent out, without knowing all about it. "But," she concluded, "it wont do any good to the business and the machine to hang crape all over them."

"That's so, Miss Geneva, but—"

"There's no *but* to it, Ezra. If we can hold on a little longer, and somehow get that patent of mine on the market, I know it'll turn the tide. Millions of people use can-openers, and with this new *multum-in-parvo* device applied to ours—"

"You've said that so often, Miss Geneva," answered the old henchman, with resigned incredulity. He hobbled over and stood beside her, his thin, brown-spotted hands clasped over his thin brown waistcoat. Anxiously he observed that Miss Geneva's cheek had lost a very little of its fair, fresh roundness and color. That wounded Ezra to the heart of hearts. It would have wounded Talbot too, had he been able to see, would have made his enterprise of helping to wreck Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, all the more imperative.

Now Ezra boldly pleaded:

"Why d'you want to keep up a losin' fight? It's only discreditin' your father's memory—not helpin' it a mite; an' it's wearin' you plumb out. I aint speakin' for myself. What happens to me don't matter. I can go back to my brother's, down to Eastham on Cape Cod. I'll be all right there."

"Nonsense, Ezra!"

"But you, Miss Geneva—why, you're growin' that pickid! I'd ruther, a great sight, see you sell out for what the business an' good-will might bring—mebbe almost enough to cover liabilities—an' then marry some nice, good, hustlin' young fella—"

"That'll do, Ezra; that'll do. You've got your work. Let me do mine!"

DECISIVELY she went on opening letters. This kind of talk, in her present mood, decidedly wouldn't do. She swallowed hard, and ripped the disheartening envelopes with an energy quite disproportionate to the task.

At the third one she gasped, turned red, then pale. She sank back in the antique swivel-chair. The letter shook in her hand. A little slip of paper with a perforated end fluttered to the desk.

"Oh!" gasped Geneva.

Ezra turned.

"What now?" he anxiously queried.

"Dear Miss Geneva, please listen to an old man, an'—"

Geneva's eyes closed. Ezra thought she was fainting. But all at once she sat up very straight, and in a quivering voice exclaimed:

"Just listen to *this*!

R. G. Thacher & Co.,
176 South Exchange St.,
City.

Gentlemen:

Inclosed find check for One Thousand Dollars (\$1000.), covering sale of 200 shares of your Preferred, to Simpson Peters Co., New York.

Very truly yours,
McCallum & Rice."

Old Litchfield stood there, trembling, staring. He advanced to her, with hands outstretched.

"Miss Geneva! What—*what*?"

"We've done it, Ezra! We've pulled through! We—we've—"

Ezra turned and hastened toward the faucet over the little sink in the corner.

"I'll get you a glass o' water, Miss Geneva! There, there now, don't cry—don't cry."

Between the glass of water that the old man's shaking hands slopped, and Geneva's bright brown eyes brimming from a heart too long full, they had rather a moist time of it.

But with R. G. Thacher & Co. saved, what mattered a little moisture, either inside the office or outside? In spite of it all, the sun was shining as it never had, for Miss Geneva.

ANOTHER month, rolling round as months—be they good or bad—always do, brought Christmas very nigh. But Christmas cheer was about the last thing in this world to fill the heart of Talbot Sears. A very great, consuming bitterness had crowded it all away—that and a heavy anger against Bob Boardman, stockbroker in his business-hours, dicer with Destiny outside of them.

"Nice, healthy dopester *you* are, you with your infernal hoodoo!" he giped as, late of a December afternoon, Boardman and he sat together in Talbot's bachelor diggings. "When you framed that little deal, you certainly pulled a bone. Sure-fire proposition, all right, only it shot the wrong way."

Boardman looked chopfallen, under the light of the soft-shaded table-lamp.

"Damned sorry, old man," he answered. "Of course you know I never meant to crab you. But I should have realized Shaw was right when he said it's always silly to give advice, and fatal to give good advice."

"Good advice! Yeah, great! But *you're* bearing up, all right. Everybody's got fortitude enough to stand the wallops their friends get. Where do *I* fit, now?"

"My motives were the best, Talby."

"Well, you know what speedway's paved with good intentions. Now see what you've gone and done!"

Boardman smoked in moody silence, and shook his head. At last he placated:

"I never knew anything like it, Talby. It looked to me like a positively sure shot. When I had the Simpson Peters Company take your anonymous thousand and buy those two hundred shares from McCallum & Rice, and give 'em to Leatherbee, how could *I* know his jinx had gone on strike? I never knew it was a union jinx! It had never shown any eight-hour, closed-shop principles, before. It was the most con-

scientious, open-shop jinx I'd ever known, and—"

"So it is, for me!" cut in Talbot angrily. "This Leatherbee hoodoo of yours has crabbed me just as he's always crabbed everybody he's ever had any dealings with, directly or indirectly. Why, you poor fish, see what's happened now! With that thousand of my money—"

"Yes, I know all about it," gloomed Boardman. "She's gone and put her patent through, and got orders enough—"

"So she'll never need *me*," Talbot finished. "That's a royal cinch. She's launched a successful business career for herself with my mute, inglorious kale and a damn' can-opener. From now on her motto will be: 'Why, then, the world's mine oyster, which I with Carbury's Can-cutter, Incorporated, will open.' Now you *have* gone and done it—you and your pet hoodoo!"

Again Boardman shook his head.

"No," said he, "it doesn't seem credible. With two hundred shares of Carbury, preferred, in his jeans,—the way it's soaring now and bound to go,—Leatherbee'll be fixed for life. It isn't reasonable, Talby. It isn't possible! It's a slip of Saturn, a kink in the cosmos, or something. All his life, Leatherbee's ruined everything he's in any way been connected with. This Carbury Can-cutter business just simply can't succeed, with Leatherbee in on it. The thing's contrary to all the laws of nature and Einstein. There's been a slip-up in the universe, somewhere."

"The slip-up's in your fool superstition, I tell you!" Talbot retorted. "Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, *is* going, and Leatherbee's a made man, and—and Geneva's ten million miles away from me, now. If you'd only let her plug the losing game a little longer, let her lose out in the natural course of events—"

A *brrrrrrr* of the doorbell interrupted him. He got up and slatted to the door, in slippers. Boardman, his lean frame sunk far down in an easy-chair, looked after him with eyes of misery.

"The laws of probability were all against it," he murmured. "Combinations and permutations all indicated—"

At the door, the Jamaica negro elevator-boy grinned and announced:

"Yere's yo' paper, Mr. Sears. An' yere's a letter jus' come in, on de las' mail."

Talbot returned with letter and paper, to the living-room. He looked a little pale.

"It's from Geneva," said he. "The final wallop! Everything's all off, now—thanks to you and your meddling with hoodoos!"

Boardman framed no answer. The logic of facts had his theorizings beaten clean through the ropes. Moodily he lighted a cigarette and studied his boot-toes.

Talbot meantime held the letter in an unsteady hand, loath to open it and read his doom.

"Tough luck!" murmured Boardman as Talbot finally ripped the envelope. Through a certain instinct of delicacy, Boardman picked up the newspaper from the table where Talbot had thrown it, and with a face of commiseration began casually looking it over.

A SHOUT, hoarsely and profanely jubilant, made him look up just as his eyes had focused on a paragraph that graced the bottom of page two.

"What's the matter, old top?" he demanded. "Gone wrong in the bean?"

"She—hang it all, Bob—she's—*accepted* me!" vociferated Talbot, with extravagant caperings. "She says—business judgment vindicated—fulfilled father's wishes and carried on Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, to success—old family name honorably upheld—now merging with Can-opener Combine and selling patents for— independent income assured, and will retire from business—free to follow dictates of her own—and she's mine, and—oh, joy! Oh, boy!"

"By Jove!" cried Boardman, jumping up. "All she wanted was success, and then you. And this item, here, explains how she *could* succeed, with Leatherbee in on it, and—"

"Oh, shake! Slap me on the back, Bob!" exulted Talbot. "Do something, say something. Tell me it's real! But how—how the devil can it be, with that hoodoo?"

"See here!" Boardman commanded thrusting the paper at his pal.

Talbot's dizzied eyes read where Boardman's finger pointed:

Jonah K. Leatherbee, age 44, of Des Moines, Iowa, was found dead in his room, 198 Parkland St., at 10:30 this morning.

He died while reading a morning paper, which he still held in his hand when discovered. He had marked with a pencil a financial item stating that Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, had just kited to 160³/₄.

Medical Examiner Pencoyd reports that death was due to heart-failure.



Bill Garford's Last Play

That famous jewel "The Glowing Ember" causes another plot and another tragedy, and then comes home to rest.

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

FROM the veranda of "Sarkie's," one has a view of the river, the rice-mills and native villages on the opposite bank, and steamers lying at the piers downstream. When there is any breeze at all across the water and mud-flats, one gets rather more of it there than anywhere else in Rangoon. And the farther corner is secluded enough at midafternoon for more or less confidential talk. There was a table between the four of them—with iced brandy-pegs and cigars. Carrington, buyer for one of the great London jewel-houses, believed he was hot on the trail of the greatest ruby known to exist, and had made exceedingly tempting offers to the man who he was convinced had the jewel in his possession. Captain Archibald Soames of the Indian Army, the supposed possessor, had been trying for two or three months to make up his mind whether there was reasonable doubt as to the stone in question being actually the famous "Glowing Ember" stolen from Miss Grace Armitage, sometime previously in Singapore. He had booked through to Singapore on a British-India boat with the intention of making her acquaintance

and possibly handing over the jewel, when Carrington's amazing offers and the Captain's recently aroused interest in Miss Helen Robertson, an actress in the motion-picture outfit brought out to the Orient by Harway, a Los Angeles director, induced him to stop off at Rangoon to see her work and consider Carrington's arguments. The fourth man at the table was an ex-ship-master and deep-water adventurer who had twice had the ruby in his possession and lost it—Bucko Bill Garford. Carrington was getting just impatient enough to come out and talk about the jewel openly, prepared to see anyone else's offer and go it one better.

"Captain," he said, "there are a number of stones in the Chandni Chowk at Delhi which I should pick up for my house, and I ought to get back there before they're sold to some one else—but I want the Glowing Ember more than all the rest of them, and I've come a thousand or so miles out of my way to see if I couldn't buy it. Now, if you don't think my offer quite good enough, suppose you mention a price at which you're willing to sell—with-out any more side-stepping. We'll pay it

if the sum is at all within reason. I practically know you've got it!"

"Hmph! I don't mind admitting, now, that I did have a ruby weighing approximately a hundred and fifty carats—but that's not saying I still have it! As a matter of cold fact, I *haven't!*"

"WHAT!" "The devil!" "What dy'e mean, Soames! Not got it? Who has?" The other three men were explosive—and frankly skeptical.

"I'd like to know, myself, who has it now, and how he got it, but I probably never will! When a thing of that sort is once lost, one might as well accept the fact as final and forget it. Nobody is going to *return* such a thing for any reward which might be offered! I picked up that stone from the floor of a certain room one night—had no clue whatever as to who might have dropped it there—waited over two months for some hint that such a thing had been lost—showed it to Hop Feng in the Chandni Chowk. He said it was unquestionably the Glowing Ember, giving that opinion as a jewel-expert; but until recently, I didn't believe it impossible that two such rubies could exist. I booked passage to Singapore with my mind pretty well made up about handing it over to Miss Armitage, if she were still there. Then Carrington stirred up my doubts again, not so much concerning the identity of the stone as to the American girl's being able to establish any legal claim to it so long after it was stolen—considering the number of hands it must have passed through. So I stopped off here, partly to reconsider the matter, partly to see Harway and his outfit making cinema-films."

"And you were fool enough to carry that stone on you!"

"When it came to the point, I didn't dare risk anything else! I sent off two packages from Delhi by registered post. On the *Taroba* I handed over another package to be kept in the purser's safe during the voyage. But the ruby itself I wrapped in loose tobacco and carried in a rubber pouch I was constantly using—"

An ominous look that was little short of frightful came and went like a flash in Bill Garford's face as he inwardly cursed himself for lost opportunities which he hadn't believed within his grasp. His fingers and his voice were under perfect control as he spoke, but something in the deep-water bucko's remark sent a shiver

down Captain Soames' back—he couldn't tell just why.

"There were two men on that boat, Captain,—as I believe,—who would certainly have cut your throat and chucked you overboard had they even dreamed you would take the chance of toting that stone around with you! How did you lose it?"

"I've no idea! I was using the tobacco-pouch yesterday morning—with the ruby in it. Then I got into that mix-up with the natives while Harway was shooting his street-scene with the elephants and Miss Robertson. While getting clean and patched up, I didn't happen to use my pipe—smoked a couple of cigars instead. After dinner, when I felt in my pocket for the pouch, it was gone—that's all there was to it! I fancy there were a dozen opportunities for picking my pocket since morning, if anyone happened to be after that pouch in particular. By the way, old chap,"—to Harway—"how was it that your people jumped me and bowled me over on the ground at the start of the muss? Can't understand what I'd done to them at all!"

"They were *not* my people, Captain—Hindu *mahouts* whom I hired with the elephants. They got a fool notion in their heads that you were trying to insult a high-caste Hindu woman on the street and didn't wait to ask for explanations—had no idea that Miss Robertson was part of my outfit, like the fake rajah on the elephant."

"MY word! I was about to compliment her upon the make-up when those fellows started the row—but it hadn't occurred to me that she was good enough to make *them* fancy her the real thing! At all events, there was opportunity in that mix-up either for the pouch to have been knocked out of my pocket, or for some one who'd been watching his chance, to have picked my pocket when three or four of them were on top of me. What I really believe is that some one got it while we were among that crowd in the lobby waiting for dinner! It's gone! You might hunt from here to Mandalay an' down to Martaban for the next five an' twenty years without spotting the stone unless it turns up for sale unexpectedly. After all, it's a bit of a relief—though I regret that it's now impossible for me to hand Miss Armitage the ruby if I decided it was her property."

Carrington threw his hands apart in

a gesture of futility. It was generally assumed by this time, throughout India, that he would prove the highest bidder if the stone came to light, but he had little hope of being approached concerning it. Privately, he was convinced that one or more Orientals had been on the track of the jewel for months and had now gotten possession of it—in which case it might not be seen again for another hundred years or so. He laughed good-naturedly at the fruitless chase which had brought him to Rangoon with Soames—said he'd be taking the next steamer to Calcutta.

GARFORD had been slouched down in his Bombay chair, chewing the end of a cigar to pulp as he went over in mind various possibilities. Several years before drifting into the motion-picture business, Tom Harway had sailed with him as mate. He was a typical deep-water man with nerves of steel—full of initiative, afraid of nothing, on the alert for any chance speculation or opportunity for making money. Suppose, now, that Harway had suspected the presence of the ruby in that tobacco-pouch and worked out the details of a clever scheme to get it? There had been gossip enough in Delhi concerning the Glowing Ember to have interested him in the stone, set him quietly investigating one clue after another as to its possessor. The more Garford thought over this possibility, however, the less likely it seemed that Harway could have had any idea as to the ruby's being in Soames' possession—still less, taking the risk of carrying it about with him. This left a probability that the Orientals must have gotten it—but through a clever scheme to use a motion-picture in the Golden Temple at Benares, Garford had managed to give the jewel such a sinister reputation that very few of the superstitious natives would have touched the thing for any consideration. The ex-shipmaster by no means gave up his relentless pursuit of the stone—the obsession was too strong for that; but he saw no other course for the present than sticking around Rangoon to see if any hint cropped out during the next few weeks.

As for Tom Harway, he presently excused himself with the remark that he had promised to drive Miss Robertson around by the Lakes before dinner, and left them in order to hire a car at the nearest garage. He'd had no opportunity for seeing Miss Robertson alone since the mix-up of the

previous day in which Captain Soames had figured so prominently, but without her knowledge he had watched her nearly every moment of the time, so that in case anyone interfered with her, he could have been on hand within a few seconds. She had spent an hour or two after dinner with the men during the previous evening—but aside from that had been with nobody save the other women of the outfit.

When Tom Harway and Miss Robertson were running along a deserted strip of road at the north side of Great Royal Lake in Dalhousie Park, she took a rubber tobacco-pouch from a pocket in her skirt and handed it to him.

"You've kept me altogether in the dark concerning this affair, Tom—I haven't the least idea what it's all about, but I know that shooting film is only a detail. Here's the thing you slipped into my hand—I've kept it out of sight, of course; but I think it's time I knew what's going on—don't you?"

"Humph! I'll show you, girl—in about half a minute! And you're in on a good fat share of whatever we get out of it—don't forget *that*! Look here!"

HE hurriedly dug the loose tobacco out of the pouch, pawed it apart with his fingers and brought to light a hard lump of something which had been in the center of it. This proved upon careful examination to be a slightly flattish, rounded pebble—an ordinary beach pebble, about the size of an English walnut, but flatter. Harway turned the pouch inside-out, pawed through every fiber of the tobacco, almost frantically, with the same net result—one beach-pebble. Miss Robertson had been watching his proceedings with intense though silent interest. After a moment or two she asked:

"Well? What's the joke?"

"Something over a million dollars, girl—that's all! Of course, I don't figure we'd have taken in as much as that, but it would have run pretty close to *half* a million, unquestionably!"

"Well? Go on!"

"Soames had a ruby about this size which he picked up from the ground somewhere—probably the famous Glowing Ember, which was stolen from that American girl in Singapore sometime ago. Carrington was positive he had it—came down on the steamer with us to buy the stone. Told Soames it would be impossible to prove

Miss Armitage's ownership, and would have gone as high as half a million when he finally decided to sell. Garford undoubtedly suspected the Captain of having it—that was the reason he trailed along too, after getting us to make that picture which he calculated would scare the natives out of trying to get it.

"I picked up this pouch from the deck where Soames dropped it one day, coming down—felt the hard lump inside, and was sure it must be the ruby. The Captain admitted to us an hour ago that he had the jewel in this pouch all the time. The pouch hasn't been out of your possession since I got it in that street mix-up. Of course you hadn't the slightest idea what I wanted of the thing. And now—we find either that Soames is a damned sight smarter than we thought him and substituted this pebble after hiding the stone in some other place, or else the pouch was taken from his pocket by parties unknown, the pebble substituted, and then slipped back again. If I've sized up the Captain right, this last theory is the only possible one. And yet—I don't know! He *might* have been foxy enough to make such a play! But I reckon there's one thing sure—if Bill Garford had had any idea the ruby was *on* him instead of in the purser's safe or sent by registered post, Soames would never have lived to see Rangoon! I kinda think Bucko Bill has been after the ruby for a long time—there was some talk of his being the one who took it from Miss Armitage at the Governor's Ball in Singapore, but of course no proof whatever of such a supposition."

"But look here, Tom! Where do *you* come in on this? What possible right had *you* to take the ruby from Captain Soames and try to sell it, as you were going to?"

"The same right as anyone else who gets on the track of one of the world's great jewels and thinks it is in the possession of some other man who has at least no *better* right to it! Soames found it just by accident—never paid a penny for the thing, would have sold it eventually for whatever he could get, which was a lot! He might have *thought* of giving it to Miss Armitage—but he wouldn't, in the end! Nobody would, considering the impossibility of proving it was hers. When one picks up a thing of this size, worth a million dollars or more—findings is keepings! *Anybody* would claim ownership of a thing like that if he thought he could get away

with it! I'd do it myself in one holy minute! Nobody even suggests that either Miss Armitage or the Rajah of Mong Klang, who gave it to her, paid a single *anna* for the stone—so they're certainly not out of pocket by its loss! They had it—and then it passed to some one else. Possibly twenty people have had it since! How would you prove ownership through a trail like that—a bloody one, you may be sure?"

"H-m-m—I suppose those arguments would satisfy almost anybody, Tom. They're plausible enough. And yet it seems to me that they don't quite do away with the fact that Miss Armitage remains the last undisputed, legal owner anyone knows about! However—you didn't get the stone, and you've no idea where it is: that lets you out, doesn't it? Might as well forget the thing! What specially interests me just now is what you have in mind about getting pictures out here—Whether you're going to make some more until your cash is gone, or take the outfit home while you've got enough left for the transportation? How about it?"

"Except for something Captain Soames had in mind, I'd take the next boat down to Singapore! That's on the way home, at least—and we could decide, there, whether it might pay to shoot some local color in the Dutch Indies or not. I've not the faintest idea what Soames is chewing over, but he's dining this evening with an old pal who's a deputy commissioner out here, and it had something to do with what his friend told him. Soames asked me not to make definite plans until I talked with him in the morning, or late tonight. You have made a hit with him, Helen! Now that there's no longer an object in it, I'm kinda sorry—he's a rather decent young fellow, and I don't believe you really want to marry him. Anyhow, it will do no harm to stick around until we hear what his scheme is."

GARFORD and Carrington dined with them when they returned to Sarkie's, but they saw nothing of the Captain until he came in about ten with his friend the deputy commissioner and a Captain Jim Medford—a rather famous character in the East whose yacht, the *Bandarwallah*, was then lying off Sarkie's in the Rangoon River. After general introductions, Captain Medford suggested that Harway and Miss Robertson accompany Soames and his friend aboard the yacht for a late sup-

per and a discussion of something which the deputy commissioner had suggested. As the party, after coming off in the launch, went below to the after-saloon, used by the Medfords as a living-room, they were met by the Captain's wife and—somewhat to Soames' confusion—Miss Grace Armitage, the much-talked-of former owner of the Glowing Ember. When the supper had proceeded as far as coffee and cigarettes, Captain Jim turned to Harway:

"I understand from Soames, Mr. Harway, that you formerly held a master's ticket for sail and a mate's for steam—also that you subsequently put in a few years with the Indian secret service before drifting into the movie-business. Am I right as to that?"

"Covers several years of my life, Cap'n. I reckon I know the seven seas and the underworld of India about equally well."

"Never actually saw the inside of a harem or a *zenana* while you were in the service—did you?"

"No. I thought of risking it in women's clothes once or twice, when the play seemed to offer a chance—but the consequences would have gone far beyond *me*. Even the hint that such a thing had been done, gossiped about the bazaars, would have aroused so much feeling against the Government that we'd have had a *jihad* without much question. My chief warned me against anything of the sort. He was dead right, too!"

"YES—I guess he was. But suppose you could shoot with a movie-camera the actual everyday life in a *zenana*? Would the film be of much real value to you?"

"By thunder, it *ought* to be! It's something nobody has ever yet got! If it were really *authentic*, the producers ought to fall all over themselves bidding for it! And yet—I can see where it mightn't turn out just that way. I've seen enough of native life under the surface to know that it's not at all what Americans and Europeans *think* it is. Anyhow—well, if I ever get the chance to shoot anything like that, I'll jump at it, whether it's a paying investment or not! Why do you ask? Have you any scheme that would make such a proposition possible?"

"Why—I don't know whether I have or not! But it just happens that a peculiar combination of circumstances might offer an opening. The case is like this: The old Rajah of Mong Klang, who was poi-

soned by one of his *zenana* women a few years ago, happened to be of mixed blood. His mother was a Hindu of the Brahmin religion, and his father was part Rajput also—unlike the Burmese all around them who, with the Shans, are four-fifths Buddhists. When the Rajah ascended the *musnud*, he paid frequent visits to his relatives in Benares—the holy Brahmin city. He was dead stuck on Hindu-Saracenic architecture, Brahmin manners and customs, Hindu ideas in regard to family life and the beauty of women. So when he built his new palace, it was a reproduction of one he had seen near Agra—and he set up a regular Hindu *zenana* as fully equipped with women as a Mohammedan harem and with about the same taste as to feminine looks. I heard of one Tamil, and a Siamese girl, but I don't think there was a Burmese or a Shan in the lot.

"Well, he made Jardine, the American archæologist, his heir—and about that time was poisoned off. They nearly got Jardine too, but he lived to come back, ascend the *musnud* and win over the cordial liking of nearly the entire population. Naturally, he didn't care about taking over the old Rajah's *zenana*, so he pensioned off the women and lodged them comfortably in some of the neighboring villages. But the old *zenana* part of the palace has been left exactly as it was when they occupied it—simple enough matter to get them all back there temporarily and induce one of his *tuans* to impersonate the old Rajah. Being Buddhists, they would have no religious scruples, I think, and would keep their mouths shut, under his orders, if they even suspected what was being done. The women, of course, would do whatever Jardine ordered them to do—inasmuch as he has absolute power of life or death over everyone in his province. There would be, naturally, one stipulation if the Rajah consented to anything of the sort—you would have to bond yourself under penalty of imprisonment not to permit such a film to be shown anywhere in Asia, East Africa or the Malay Archipelago. As a former service man, you wouldn't risk it, anyhow—in fact, that's the consideration which induces me to offer my assistance in anything of the sort. You know enough of the danger to be mighty careful in keeping that film from being seen out here!"

The director whistled softly. "Cap'n, that's a combination of circumstances that wouldn't happen again in just this way

for two or three hundred years, out here! You think the Rajah might be inclined to accommodate us that far?"

"I think he might do it as a favor to me and my wife if there were no other considerations; but it seems to me the idea will appeal to him professionally as something which ought to be done for its educational value if for no other reason."

"Would you be willing to wire him—and ask—for me?"

"You evidently haven't been that far back along the Shan border! Jardine is methodically putting Mong Klang on the map as fast as the many obstacles will permit, but there are neither railways nor other practical through-roads—no wires—can't even get that far up the Salwin River except when it's high during the rains, with a light-draft boat. Only way you could get there would be to hire something drawing less than five feet, big enough for your outfit to live on until you get back to Martaban. The Rajah has a powerful radio-installation—but you know as well as I do that it won't be safe to make any such proposition through the air when it would be picked up by half a dozen native operators at least!

"What I had in mind was this—if you and Miss Robertson appeared to be congenial folks, after we'd met: I've taken the *Bandarwallah* up there once, and am now going up again—we three are very much interested over the phenomenal way in which Jardine is developing his province. A good part of his population are Shans and Yunnan Chinese, who think him a bit supernatural and fairly worship the man for his exceptionally decent treatment of them. They keep so close a watch over him that none of the old conspirators—Kutyawlat's crowd—have any chance for assassination, night or day. Now, we've room for you two and Captain Soames in the saloon—can rig up something like second-class accommodation forward for the rest of your outfit, so they needn't mess with the crew. We'll take you up to Mong Klang and back if you care to risk the possible, though not probable, casualties in a country that is not yet altogether civilized. Then, if you and the Rajah hit it off, it'll be an interesting bit of work for us to watch. If you don't, it'll be simply that much of your time lost, with a pleasant trip thrown in. Of course, the rains will be getting worse before you're through—but you're all more or less acclimated, and

we've plenty of quinine aboard. What do you say?"

"Hmph! To anyone in the movie-business, it's a chance one simply can't afford to lose! Aside from that, none of us get the opportunity for such a yacht-cruise often enough to feel in the least blasé about it. Sure we'll go—and thank you for the offer!"

A WEEK later the *Bandarwallah* anchored in midstream off the little teak-port of Mong-Sak, and Captain Medford telephoned the Rajah, in Klang-Ting, of their arrival. Before night Jardine had run down from his capital in a high-powered car over the splendid new road made for him through the jungle by his Shan coolies—and dined with them on board. When the coffee and cigars appeared, Captain Jim told the Rajah how Tom Harway and his movie-outfit happened to be stranded out India way and touched upon his few years with the Indian secret service after giving up the sea as a profession. Then, with anecdotes of his adventure in disguise among the Orientals, the subject of photographing *zenana* life from the inside came about quite naturally. The seven of them were in the after-saloon with the doors closed and a Chinese crew on deck, under the faithful Wun Hop, who could be trusted to see that no prowling stranger got aboard or was even in the water alongside. When Jardine grasped the idea, he saw that the opportunity for carrying it out in his capital was one not likely to occur again in a good many years—became interested.

"You know I'm professionally an archaeologist! That's why your suggestion appeals to me as it would not to the average person. And being a good 'still' photographer myself, I've an exceptionally fine equipment for dark interior work—Cooper-Hewitt mercury tubes, all that sort of thing! Used 'em in photographing underground chambers of the old temple I dug up at Lungkor when I first came to this part of the country. As I get your idea, it's entirely feasible, with a few changes I think it would be advisable to make—one of them being the proposition for a Burmese *tuán* to impersonate me in the *zenana*. First place, he wouldn't know a tenth as much about actual living conditions in a Hindu *zenana* as I do—would queer himself and get the women scared into acting unnaturally right at the start. Of course

I don't propose to appear on the screen myself in such a way that I would be recognized, but fortunately I'm in position to cover that point very nicely without any danger of detection.

"When I came up here to ascend the *musnud*, it was a question as to whether I might not have to beat it in disguise to get out alive—so I had a number of beards and wigs made for me by an old Dutchman in Batavia who is an artist in that sort of thing. Then when I occupied the old Rajah's million-dollar palace at Klang-Ting, everybody naturally assumed that I would take over his *zenana* as well. The women expected it—were prepared to accept me, with mixed fear and satisfaction. The *tuans* assumed it as a matter of course—some of the women being supposed very handsome, having been imported from various parts of India and Persia by the old Rajah at considerable expense. Some of them had been seen outside the palace, but more had not.

"WELL, as an archæologist, I jumped at the chance for inside dope just as Harway jumped at Cap'n Jim's suggestion to come up here with his outfit. I took a chance of being poisoned—but my Chinese managed to protect me somehow. Putting on a darker wig and a Van Dyck beard, I went into the *zenana* and passively allowed the women to anything or everything they were accustomed to do. When they seemed to expect some action upon my part which I couldn't guess, I put it up to them that my customs had been different from their customs—and graciously *permitted* them to educate me in the Hindu way. A good deal of it was pretty sordid,—you'll find it so,—but I was so intensely interested in getting inside dope which no white man probably ever *did* get before, that I stood for pretty much everything—spent occasional hours in the *zenana* for a month. But I *got* it! By thunder, I *got* it! Then I scattered the entire *zenana* in villages where I could have them watched to see that they weren't up to mischief. I can have every one of them back in forty-eight hours—and the whole province is so used to my unusual doings by this time that it won't even surprise 'em, much. I can go among them with the same wig and beard and turban, as if I'd seen 'em yesterday. None of them ever saw me outside the palace."

"But how about shooting 'em with a

movie-camera? Will they stand for that—and act natural?"

"Not if they know it, of course! Before getting the women back, I'll have small holes cut through the walls of five or six rooms and the court where the *zenana* tank is, just big enough for you to shoot through—build closets with solid partitions on the other side of the walls, so that it'll be impossible for anybody to see you at work. I know you can muffle the camera, because I've seen it done. In fact, the only point which bothers me about the whole proposition is how or where you'll get the film developed, cut and patched. The nearest studios where they'd make a good job of it are at Singapore and Calcutta—both of which employ natives. It would be almost impossible to have the work done without some of them seeing it. Of course, I can develop small sections of film here with my 'still' outfit—but it would be an interminable job, with very irregular development—you'd get so much 'cloud and sunlight' alternating as the film ran off the reel that nobody could look at it for more than a minute or so. And we ought to see bits of what we've done before you leave, in order to know what sort of exposures we're getting. I figure the light up here, in any open space clear of the jungle, is at least ten or fifteen per cent quicker—after a rain—than in either Calcutta or Singapore, where there's more salt haze and soft-coal smoke."

"I think we should be able to get around that without much difficulty, Your Highness."

"Oh—cut that, Harway! We're not ceremonious among white folks up here. My friends or guests are considered as belonging to the Raj, you know!"

"All right, Mr. Jardine—that's something of a relief, because I've never traveled round much with ruling princes. Well, as I started to say, the man in charge of your radio outfit must be a corking good electrician, and one of my men is a first-class mechanic who has worked in a developing-plant for two or three years and knows every last detail of it. He can easily make a developing-trough with an electric-spark and shutter at one end for copying. The big drums for drying the film will be merely a carpenter's job. I've at least thirty thousand feet of film—easy to start more coming up from Singapore if you think we'll need it. Same way with chemicals—though I assume you must have

practically enough in stock right here. If there were any quick way of getting the extra stuff we need, I should think we might be ready to shoot and develop in three weeks at the outside. You'd want at least that to get your rooms and closets ready, wouldn't you?"

"Just about. As for getting stuff up here, I've got a six-hundred-ton power-boat with a very comfortable cabin—draws less than five feet, loaded, and makes twenty-five knots when there's enough smooth water for her. At this season of the year, with the first-class navigator I've in charge of her, she'll make the run from Mong-Sak to Martaban in two days and a half, allowing for all delays from bars and bends of the river. She's gone from Martaban to Singapore inside of three days. Pretty good sea-boat too—rides on top of the water like a cork. By the way, I don't know just what the effect will be, whether it might detract from the realism or not, but I think I'll let all those women get a new outfit of clothes—start them on it at once. They were a shabby lot, last time I saw 'em."

"Want Miss Robertson to help any in making suggestions about material—picturesque effect, all that sort of thing?"

"Not on your life—with all due respect to Miss Robertson. You want the real thing, don't you—the native taste in color and material just as it actually is? Some of it is pretty crude, of course—but we're after realism, aren't we? There are several shopkeepers from outside in the main bazaar at Klang-Ting; they knew about what would sell in this country when they fetched their stuff up here. No! I'll give orders that the women are to buy anything that looks good to them for *zenana* wear. We'll see what happens."

WITH the settling down of the *Bandarwallah* party in the Rajah's capital for a stay of several weeks, let us go back to Bill Garford—at "Sarkie's" in Rangoon—after Harway and the others dropped down the river on the yacht. He had seen Miss Armitage ashore that morning with the Medfords, and had his own reasons for keeping out of her way. Every time they had met, the deep-water adventurer figured that she had brought him bad luck, and he was sore enough anyhow over the Captain's loss of the ruby. He had neither clue nor theory as to who might have stolen it—and was in a nasty mood

when he drove a hired car around the Lake roads by himself to do a little quiet thinking. Just beyond the spot where Harway had examined Soames' tobacco-pouch on the previous afternoon, the ex-shipmaster noticed something red among the bushes at the side of the road, and mechanically slowed down for a closer look. It was certainly a red-rubber pouch. Garford stopped his car and got down to pick the thing up. Apparently it was identical with Soames' pouch. He emptied it—found the pebble rolled up inside the tobacco, just as Harway had disgustingly tossed the thing out of his car after showing it to Helen Robertson—and then he cursed for ten minutes, murderously:

"The damned innocent hound! Fooled the three of us without turning a hair! Rigged up this pouch with the pebble in it *expecting* it would be stolen! May have had the ruby loose in one of his pockets all the time—but probably didn't! I'd say he sent it to Singapore in one of those registered packages. Unless? By thunder! I wonder if— He'd met Grace Armitage with the Medfords *before* he decided to go upcountry with them! Best chance in the world to get her description of the stone and return it, if he's satisfied that she's the owner! In that case—eh? *The ruby must be on him—or where he can get it any time!* Hell! That settles it! Me for Mong Klang! But *how?* Jardine's people spotted me when I came down through Yunnan—had the French Government deport my whole outfit! H—m!"

Garford had let his beard grow while in Delhi. It now struck him that by dyeing it and his hair a few shades darker, it would make recognition very improbable—particularly if he altered the shape of his beard. After a good deal of figuring he finally chartered a good-sized light-draft river-boat with auxiliary motor and started up the Salwin as a wealthy teak-speculator—taking with him a secretary and a couple of Rangoon acquaintances who hoped there might be opportunity for big-game hunting.

BEFORE Garford reached Mong-Sak, having stopped at numerous villages along the river as a blind, practically all the preparations had been completed for shooting the *zenana* pictures, Pauline Medford and the two younger women being as thoroughly interested in the proposition as the men, watching every detail of the work

and making an occasional good suggestion. The Rajah was talking one morning with Harway about making a start next day, when something occurred to him as having been overlooked, possibly, by the movie-director.

"Look here, old man! The ladies have been following us around pretty closely, and they'll keep doing it if we don't flag 'em! You're likely to get several hundred feet of film which simply can't be shown on the screen—no audience would stand for it! Well—the women have got to be kept out of the palace while the shooting is done, out of the developing- and projecting-rooms until we've spotted all that sort of thing and cut it out of the film! You and I are pulling off this stunt for a purely scientific and educational purpose. In order to get the real everyday life as it is, we've got to keep shooting everything that happens, to be sure we don't miss anything that *can* be shown—but from what I saw of the *zenana* that other time, some of this is likely to prove both raw and hectic! Get me? We'll tip off Cap'n Jim on this point and make him responsible for keeping the white women somewhere else until we tackle street-scenes."

AFTER the first week's work, both Harway and the Rajah were convinced of its entire success. The shooting and the developing of the pictures had gone off wonderfully well and the film had been cut, patched and rigorously censored until both Harway and the Rajah considered it sufficiently unobjectionable to show the ladies—who were summoned into the projecting-room for a preliminary view.

As the picture was thrown upon the screen, both of the producers were busy jotting down memoranda as to one strip or another which they thought might be improved. Two or three times the film was run through the projecting-machine—and while the women studied the picture with absorbing interest, there was little comment from them until the lights were switched on again. Miss Armitage's first remark indicated an obvious reservation of opinion, a sparring for time:

"You said, Raymond, that you were going to order new clothes for all those women?" As she had once saved his life on a "B. P." steamer and they had been thrown together under very unusual circumstances, they were dispensing with formalities by this time.

"That's exactly what I did—with some idea that it might work out this way in everyday life. None of them made up more than one or two suits—it seems to be their custom to put on new clothes and *wear* them right along—sleep in 'em part of the time—until they need or get another one. That high-caste Hindu girl Gul-Moti is the only one of the lot who made up four suits and alternates 'em on different days. Because of her caste, she's probably the only one who would have been selected by any Rajah as principal wife—possibly *Ranee*—and she tries to live up to her caste, which is Rajput. The others all acknowledge it and defer to her. But concerning the clothes: as you see, it didn't take more than a day or two of wear to give them the usual sloppy, tarnished look—which of course the Cooper-Hewitt tubes brought out a good deal more noticeably than they would have looked in the ordinary subdued light of the harem."

"Well, I don't think there's any question but that you've made a picture which should interest every more or less educated man or woman in Europe or America. The making your *zenana* scenes merely part of the whole picture covering the daily phases of Oriental life gives them just their proper value and prevents their detracting from street and bazaar scenes with which the American public is somewhat familiar from the lectures of professional travelers. But the whole picture as you have built it up is vastly different from the usual conception of Oriental life among Americans and English!"

"Do you know why? It's entirely the fault of slipshod illustrators who have not been sufficiently good craftsmen to present Orientals as they really are! The popular American conception of the Orient is based upon 'The Arabian Nights' and 'The Rubaiyat'—with the many lovely illustrations our artists have given them. Had some one painted the Mesopotamians of Bagdad and the Persians of Ispahan from photographs of the genuine article, or as he actually found them on the spot, we wouldn't so mistakenly have visualized these countries through a glamour of our own imagination based upon what *we* consider romantic and beautiful! Mind you, that glamour really does exist in the Orient for me,—for Harway too, I reckon,—because we see the age-old romance and mysticism behind it, because nothing can lessen or spoil the architecture and gardens

and jungle, beautiful as a dream, in which all these teeming races of the East fit so perfectly. But I think any Caucasian must have a certain amount of education to appreciate them for what they are."

"Well, as I said before, you men have produced a picture which ought to be shown in every civilized country because of its real educational value! It holds one's interest—start to finish."

DURING the weeks at Klang-Ting the three young women had become warm friends. In discussing the Glowing Ember, one day, Helen Robertson asked the American girl if there was any way by which she could positively identify the great ruby—and Grace described a scratch she had made with a diamond upon one of the lower girdle-facets. After that, to the amazement of the other two women, Miss Robertson drew from inside her waist the stone itself—saw at a glance the little scratch which had been described—and handed it over to its legal owner. She wouldn't describe how it came into her possession, and made them promise never to tell anyone outside of their immediate families from whom Grace had obtained it.

The *Bandarwallah* party were lodged, of course, in the most comfortable suite of the palace—not far from that occupied by the Rajah, Billy Littleton and another white executive. About midnight of the following day, one of Jardine's devoted Chinese rapped softly upon the door of his room, and in whispers described a supposed teak-speculator who had come up the river on his own boat and had been dicker-ing with the Burmese *Woon-gyre* for a big shipment. The Chinese said word had come from the Coast that the man was Bucko Bill Garford in disguise—that he had gained access to the palace by climbing the marble pillars to the second-floor veranda, that Captain Soames had been found on his floor stabbed—though not fatally, as it proved—and that the adventurer was at that moment somewhere in the passages leading to the ladies' apartments. Hastily buckling a holster under his coat, Jardine ran out through the smaller halls to Grace Armitage's door, which he found had been forced open with a jimmy. Springing inside, he saw Garford holding the girl against the wall with one hand while he pressed the point of a knife just under her left breast—telling her quietly

but in deadly earnest that she could give him the ruby or die, before he searched for it.

With a single long bound the Rajah was upon him—wrenching the knife from his hand and hauling him back away from the girl. But the deep-water Bucko had been in too many fights to be easily overpowered. Tripping Jardine with a backward kick, he brought them both heavily down upon the floor and twisted himself partly loose before they were up again. What followed was the most silently terrible fight imaginable. Jardine's knowledge of *jujutsu* presently gave him a slight advantage. His fingers were gripping the adventurer's throat when one of Garford's hands found the Rajah's holster and pulled out his automatic. In another second he would have blazed into Jardine's side had not the girl suddenly pulled back his arm with all her strength so that the muzzle was turned and the ball went crashing through the adventurer's own body from side to side. He had barely the breath to gasp out: "You win, curse you, Jardine! You—win!" Then he sank down upon the floor and rolled over.

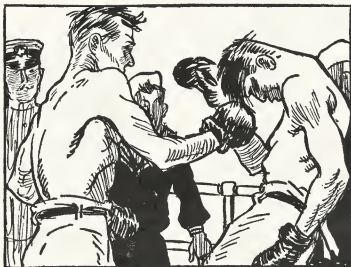
AS the girl crept into the Rajah's arms—looking shudderingly down upon what had been at least a man who never knew fear or scruple—she pressed the Glowing Ember into his hand.

"Take it, Raymond! You only gave it to me for safe-keeping in the first place! If Captain Jim had never discovered what was inside, you would have some day offered to buy that cement-casting back from me! The ruby is home at last—the superstition has come true—and you are its proper owner!"

Kissing her tenderly, Jardine thought for a moment or so—turning the stone over in his fingers, watching the dull red glow of stored-up light in it.

"Grace, how would you like to be *Ranee* of Mong Klang—live here two or three months of the year, help me put this province on the map and perhaps make it something of a health-resort, in time? Spend the rest of the year in Singapore—home in New York—anywhere you please. I'll accompany you part of the time. The ruby, of course, goes back to you for keeps—you'll wear it at my Durbars. Will you, dear?"

Her reply was scarcely audible—but entirely satisfactory.



The Admiral

*A vivid story of Navy life, by the man who wrote
"Mine in the Kite" and "The Hoodoo Turret."*

By WARREN H. MILLER

IT was at Chefoo, back in 1902, that Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans, aided by two wizard gunnery officers—now admirals themselves, praise be!—broke through the old Navy tradition of firing on the "weather roll." That system had won for us in 1812 and '65. It still survived in '98—but it was too slow for Fighting Bob! The ship took her own time about rolling, and the gun was idle a large part of the time. At Chefoo the practice of keeping the sights constantly on the mark while the gun was fired as fast as it could be served came into being, and we began to hear that expressive phrase, "hits per gun per minute." And thereby hangs a tale:

At "happy hour" on the flagship *Massachusetts* of the Nth Battle Division, Admiral Haley Houghton, commanding, first learned that there was such a person as Shell-man "Spike" Bowring aboard his ship. Aft the No. 4 turret all the crew was gathered, the officers in rows and rows on the front seats, the crew massed behind them on benches clear back to the stern clocks. Under the glare of four huge

battle-lanterns a square boxing-ring had been roped off, and in it a diminutive Filipino mess-boy was besting all comers. The little Asiatic, stripped to his boxing trunks, seemed like some active bronze statue, quick as a cat, superb with his mitts, a dodger, and a fighter with a knock-out punch. At first the sympathies of the ship had been with him, an elder-brother sentiment toward our little brown protégés, but as champion after champion of the various divisions had gone down before the Filipino's strength and activity, the honor of the white race was touched. Was there *no* one on the ship who could beat this pestilent Asiatic mess-boy?

WORD of what was going on must have got back to the Admiral's quarters, for presently the muttered whisper, "Gentlemen, the Admiral!" passed swiftly around the benches. Officers and men alike arose and stood at attention as down the long dark deck two figures loomed. One was short and thick, the grizzled captain of the *Massachusetts*. Beside him strode an enormous figure, his long boat-

cape accentuating the impressive bigness of him. In a moment more he had passed a saluting deck-officer, and the glare of the battle-lanterns fell on the seamed and aged features of Haley Houghton, rear admiral of this division of four huge dreadnaughts. A commanding presence—tall and big, savage gray eyes that even in that dim light seemed to train like a pair of fourteen-inch guns out from under bushy white eyebrows. A thick white mustache filled all the space between the long, regular nose and his forceful, fighting upper lip; deep-graven lines fell from nose-base to lip-corners, telling of the dominant will that makes admirals.

AN armchair was hastily pushed forward at the ringside as the Admiral made his way toward it. His captain took another beside him, and when both were seated, a thousand men resumed their benches. The jazz band got up by the crew for "happy hour" burst into a selection, while the gobs' funny men did absurd and unabashed capers. A grin of pleasure cracked the Admiral's heavy face as he watched them, for his was a happy ship.

Presently the White Hope entered the ring. Howls and catcalls greeted him from the crew, for Shell-man Spike Bowring of the port No. 1 five-inch, the new candidate for a Filipino knockout, was without doubt the funniest figure that ever entered a ring. He was the holy limit for lengthiness! A red pompadour, carried six feet four above the deck, surmounted a freckled and good-natured yet pugnacious face. His bare body was covered with sun-burn and freckled down to his boxing trunks. Below them, absurdly skinny and hairy legs, spotted like Bob Fitzsimmons', went down and down, to terminate in enormous flat feet. The crew yelled with delight as this human squilgee-handle stood there grinning at them, for Spike was popular. He knew little and cared less for boxing, but he carried a sincere and decisive wallop in either mitt; and besides, they all knew the show the Admiral had in store for him—and it would be a side-acher when Spike's legs got in motion!

The ensign in charge of the boxing-events called the Filipino out of his corner and got the two men together with the usual whispered explanation of the rules. Then both touched mitts, bowed to the Admiral and faced each other. The little Asiatic eyed his man speculatively. All

around him and under him and all over the ring would evidently be his tactics. In time his chance for the knockout to jaw or plexus would come.

But he had reckoned without those legs! Spike grinned some more as the Filipino squared off. He advanced a long and bony pair of arms, and then those remarkable legs began to move. No biped save a pelican ever made any such waddle! A huge riot of laughter burst out as those legs, like some awkward pair of dividers, moved the body around and around the ring after the little brown whirlwind, whose fists shot in and out—hook, uppercut, body-blow, so fast that the eye could not follow. Spike's long and feelingless arms took most of the blows and kept the Filipino out of range, while the indefatigable legs maneuvered about and about with an indescribably creaky gait, absurd in their bony length, comic in their splotches of freckles and red hair. The entire crew, from the Admiral down, had no eyes for anything else! No one watched Spike's fists, for the gait of those preposterous legs was a scream just to look at. The crew screeched and cackled; the Admiral held his sides and guffawed. Now and then a Filipino uppercut would get in, and blood trickled down Spike's chin, but he grinned on imperturbably, and the indefatigable legs moved him gunboat-wise, steaming along at about ten knots, after the agile enemy.

By the end of the round the crew were weak with laughter. They leaned up against each other, while the officers yelled in one another's faces and the Admiral was punching his captain in the ribs with delight. And just about then a sharp crack woke everybody up, for all unwatched, one of Spike's bony piston-rod arms had shot out, crashed through the little brown man's guard and knocked him spinning over the ropes clean out of the ring.

Pandemonium reigned. In ten seconds more the ensign had vaulted over the ropes and was holding Spike's gloved paw aloft in token of victory. Spike bowed to the exhausted Admiral, and then those legs took him out to the seclusion of his bathrobe, the hero of the hour. The white race was safe!

NEXT day at battle practice, however, Fate struck out with her customary blindness and laid Spike flat in the dust.

To live up to Bob Evans' concept of continuous gunfire on the mark takes years of daily drill. Then, after a whole year of steady training, in just three minutes of actual service shell-fire, all that assiduous drill and team-work is tested out on a gray target five thousand yards away and being towed along like Sam Hill. In that three minutes men are made or broken as a gun-crew. To keep up with a five-inch gun firing at full speed takes the most precise of team-work. The shell must go in just so; it is instantly followed by the two powder bags and the clang of the breech-block; at once, then, the gun fires and the breech opens again. All the time, pointer and trainer have the sights constantly on the bull's-eye, no matter what the ship may be doing, while the sight-setter sets his range and deflection by orders from the fire-control officer coming into his ears through telephone receivers. To load the gun, six men have just one second to act in concert in. No one must make the slightest deviation from that particular motion which is his share of it. A year of solid gun-drill per team is none too much to get it down fine!

Spike, being strong as an ox and tall as a ramrod, had been selected as shell-man long ago. The first time he had tried to slam that heavy projectile into a dummy breech, he had hit the metal ring instead, and the shell had bounced down on deck and put four of his toes out of action. Then the Marine officer who was training, had shoved him aside and showed him how it is done. There is a certain hunch of the shoulders, a certain movement of the arms, which brings that heavy billet of steel forward exactly parallel to the gun-bore so it will enter and seat without fail. Any deviation from exact parallel will result in a sloppy entry, or in even missing the bore entirely—and in that case the shell will strike metal and fall, half killing somebody. But with a year of hard drill, Spike was now the best shell-man of the secondary battery, for his long frame seemed made for just that job.

As the *Massachusetts* came on the range for No. 1 that day, Spike stood confidently by the breech, a tall seventy-five-pound shell standing on deck beside him. The command, "Stations!" had already been given. The gun-crew were all keyed up to the highest pitch, for their crucial three minutes of all the year was about to begin! Under the pointer's and trainer's hands

the gear-wheels revolved slowly, keeping the sights on the target to the roll of the ship. The busy sight-setter adjusted azimuth-sword and deflection-drum as ranges from the finders came down to him. The gun-captain stood with one hand on the breech lever, stolid and immovable, a big, unemotional man, solid and dependable. Behind the crew stood the ensign in charge of the gun, severely at attention, himself keyed up to a tense pitch of expectancy. He too would be made or broken when this was over!

"Coming on the range—test primers and firing-circuits!" he barked suddenly out of the tense, waiting silence.

The top of the primer answered him. Then: "Officer's call!" his sharp voice snapped out. Bells and buzzers immediately hummed in the gun-compartment.

"Whistle!" The red powder-flag passed them on its way up to the signal-yard. The men all stiffened to alert attention.

"Commence firing!" yelled the ensign.

Instantly the crew moved as one man, like a well-trained football team. The shell and both powder-bags flashed into the bore; the breech snapped shut; and at once the enormous roar of the discharge rang out. There is no crack like the ear-splitting crash of the five-inch! A blinding yellow glare and a murk of brown smoke filled the whole compartment. With the quickness of thought the breech opened; a yelp of "Bore clear!" rang out; the second shell and its powder bags slid in; and again came the terrific *Bang!* of the gun. It was bewildering, the quickness of that action, for hits per gun *per minute* are what count!

A GUST of wind swept the smoke away temporarily. The sudden clarity of vision offered a temptation to Spike to glance out at the target and see how they were getting on and it proved irresistible. For a single second his eyes shot out over the sea—and during that instant he realized with a sickening shock that something awful had happened to him! For at once he found himself with a shell in his hands and the breechblock closed! The instant when he should have shoved in that shell had come and gone! He had no time to yell out, "Silence!" before the gun went off and its breech opened for another shell. With a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach, Spike shoved in the shell in his hands for the next load, just

a fraction of a second ahead of the powder bags; but already he knew he was lost. He had missed his motion on that third shot, *his* part in the team-work of the six men who served the ammunition. That last shot had *sounded* like the others—but there would be no answering shell-spout! Cursing wrathfully, Spike kept on with the fast work to the end of the string with his last two shells, and then came the order: "Cease firing!"

"Four hits! Wonder where in hell that third shell went!" gasped the pointer stepping down from his platform to receive the congratulations of the crew.

Spike faced Ensign Wood unhappily as he turned from shaking hands with the pointer and trainer. One telltale shell still remained in the rack. There was *no* getting away from that nude and uncomfortable fact!

The officer eyed it, speechless with astonishment. "Bowring—where did *that* thing come from!" he demanded, pointing at the accusing projectile. "There were only five shells served out, and we've fired our five shots!"

Spike had hardly begun to stammer an explanation before the Assistant Gunnery Officer pounced down among them from his station in the upper fire-control, his face white with rage.

"Ensign Wood," he snarled, "your third shot had no shell—kindly explain if you can how *that* happened!" snorted the irate lieutenant-commander freezingly.

Wood stuttered and stammered confusedly as he faced the A. G. O. The incredible explanation that Spike had somehow forgot to put in his shell wouldn't explain at all! He merely pointed to the crestfallen shell-man and sputtered.

The commander ignored Spike entirely. Wood was responsible for his crew: "It makes a total loss on an otherwise perfectly good score, Mr. Wood," he reprimanded. "You had no other duty in the world but to see that *a* shell and two powder bags were passed into that gun for each shot," he lectured with biting sarcasm. "You'll get a chance to face the Captain tonight and explain *all* about it!"

The commander turned away huffily and ran up the ladder back to the secondary fire-control in the tops. Ensign Wood mopped a flushed face as he looked speechlessly at Spike. The latter quaked, his bony knees actually shaking under him. Sympathy for his officer, chagrin, intense

and unforgiving for himself, overwhelmed him.

"Shoot me, Mr. Wood! Shoot me for a dizzy boot!" he begged. "I aint fit to man a one-pounder, sir! It was all so quick. I just looked out oncet, at that target—and s'welp me, sir, they got in them powder bags and shut the breech on me before I could make a dive with the shell."

"Why didn't you yell, 'Silence!' then?" demanded the ensign.

"Didn't have time, sir," pleaded Spike. "The next shot was on before I could so much as open my mouth. *Blooe!* Just like that! So I shoved in the shell I had. . . . On the level, I'm a boot, all right!"

THE rest of the crew glowered at him.

It was hard to forgive! They had lost their chance at the coveted *E* by that bone-head play. The gun-captain, however, clapped Spike on the shoulder sympathetically.

"Forget it, Spike, old iron-man!" he growled. "We all pull bones, take it from me! Better luck next time!"

"I'll do what I can for you, Bowring," said Ensign Wood at length. "But the report will have to stand. I'm afraid it will mean a disrating to landsman for you, though! —Secure, there!" he broke off suddenly, returning the crew to their immediate duties.

In silence the gun was secured and the omitted shell returned to the magazine room. The day wore on; the *Massachusetts* made turn after turn in firing each gun of her secondary battery, but it was a disgruntled gun-crew at the port No. 1 five-inch that trained on the target thereafter while the other guns were firing.

At "Pipe down!" Spike went to his hammock discouraged and downhearted. He was a broken man. Mr. Wood's report would go to the Captain and from there to the Admiral with the endorsement, "Recommend that this man be disrated to landsman." He was sure of it, for the Navy is merciless in passing the buck. The Admiral's endorsement would be the single word, "Approved." The name Bowring was nothing to him, and the circumstances connected with that name would be galling indeed.

Spike felt, rebelliously, that his record entitled him to another chance. He had had hopes of being promoted to gun-captain himself—had worked hard for it for

three years, coming up gradually from powder-man down in the magazine, up to shell-passer and finally shell-man. Disrating was a dire penalty for one brief second of inattention! His record was good, but the trouble was that the Admiral would know nothing of his record. Just his name and his misdemeanor would come before him, and down would go the rubber stamp and the faithful signature.

Spike tossed and turned, unable to sleep. Finally relief came to him, in an old story out of "The Arabian Nights" that had impressed him once as a boy back in the little old house in his home town. The story told how, when the Caliph was sick, an obscure donkey-boy got word to him of the remedy that saved his life. How he did it interested Spike, for their cases were somewhat similar. The donkey-boy told a friend who supplied the Caliph's household with meat. That friend passed the word to a steward in the palace. The steward passed it on to the captain of the guard of the royal chambers. And the captain of the guard told the Caliph's barber, who above all men had the Caliph's ear.

Looked good, thought Spike. The way to reach the Admiral's ear was *not* through the official channels of Mr. Wood, the Exec. or the Captain, but rather through a much more obscure route. Spike planned it out and then fell asleep, hugely relieved.

NEXT morning before "turn-to" he went forward to the wardroom and sought out his former antagonist, the Filipino mess-boy. That *insurrecto* was the bosom chum of another sleek Asiatic, the Admiral's personal cabin-boy. All the crew knew that the loquacious Ichi was a privileged character, because his wonderful mixture of pidgin-English and Navy was the Admiral's constant delight. On him Spike pinned his hopes.

The Filipino grinned, slant-eyed, as Spike unfolded his scheme—defly, subtly, with due regard for the Oriental nicety of mind. Yes, he would tell Ichi the whole story, grinned Bolongan, the little brown boxer. He had no feeling against Spike for that knockout of the night before, only respect and the admiration of one pugilist for another when each shows class and no meanness. In fact, it had been something of a relief to Bolongan to *get* beaten, for it had been hideously embarrassing to beat

all those honorable white men, the hopes of the ship. He grinned delightedly as Spike developed his idea, tickling the Oriental subtleties of his mind, and he nodded and nodded and bowed and bowed until the gruff Spike was on the point of punching him again to make sure that he understood it all.

"Mind you put the old boy wise through the topside mess-boy, Bolongan, or it'll be you and me all around the turrets and all over the afterguard—you savvy?"

Bolongan grinned some more. "Me savvy! Me leek you next time, sure 'bout dat!" he chuckled, dodging into the pantry as Spike's eleven-inch paw reached for him.

"Tur-r-n-to!" broke up the rough-house impending and sent Spike on the run for his division. He grew depressed as the day wore on and nothing happened even remotely connected with his fate. In fact, the world was occupied with far greater matters, Spike realized before another hour had passed. His first intimation that anything unusual was "on" was the shrill pipe of the boatswain's mates to knock off "field day" work all over the ship. Spike put away his rags and polish-box from cleaning bright-work on the port No. 1 five-inch, and ran to join in the muster of his division. The turret divisions were passing them in long double lines, marching aft: and as soon as muster was finished, Mr. Wood barked out the commands that moved their own division down the long secondary gun-deck to the after-deck.

Here they formed in a hollow square with the other divisions, a thousand men in massed ranks, the great turret-guns being swung out to port and starboard to make room for them all. Something big was coming off, thought Spike as he peered shyly over the shoulders of the men in rank in front of him. The ship was never dressed ordinarily on field-day. In front of the No. 4 turret the marines were drawn up opposite him in a rigid and resplendent line, their officers standing at attention with drawn swords, as is their privilege. Diagonally across from Spike's division all the officers of the flagship were mustered in a long line of gleaming white, the executive arranging them from left to right according to their rank.

Presently the Captain of the *Massachusetts* came down from the saluting deck, marched to the center of their hollow square, faced about and stood at attention.

"Attention! Parade—*rest!*" he ordered.

The ranks stiffened. A thousand men faced forward, eyes front, not a muscle moving. And the sight before them was well worth seeing, for the Admiral himself was now coming down from the upper deck, attended by his fleet-captain and all his staff, resplendent in the gold circlets of their office!

"Hand—salute!" barked the Captain. A thousand hands rose as one to cap-brims, and for a long moment not a soul in all those rigid ranks stirred.

The Admiral halted and returned salute. The Captain barked out a short yelp, and a thousand hands fell in one multitudinous flash. But the crew's eyes were busy, you may be sure, for as one man they all saw what Spike did, that the Admiral now bore not two but *three* silver stars, blazing silver stars, on the golden splendor of his shoulder-straps! An indistinguishable hum like a suppressed cheer went all through the ranks. Spike felt queer thrills chasing all over him. This was great—*simply great!* How they had all admired the old boy, and here he was getting his reward—and they too—for all that diligent year of gun-drill and fleet-drill! Here was glory for all of them, for *their* rear admiral had been promoted to vice! That was what those three stars meant!

Tears of glad emotion sprang to Spike's eyes as the Flag secretary stepped out and read in loud tones the orders from Washington which promoted Haley Houghton from the Nth Battle Division to command of a whole squadron of the North Atlantic Fleet. Then the guns on the saluting deck barked seven times as his rear admiral's flag came slowly down; and after an impressive interval, they barked eleven times more as the red square of a vice admiral's insignia rose slowly to the mast-head.

"Now then, men—three rousing cheers!" shouted the Captain of the *Massachusetts*. A mighty roar rang out, once, twice, three times. Spike and his neighbors cheered themselves hoarse, shook hands, punched one another with delight. *They* had done it! From the Admiral down to the most obscure powder-man in the depths of the magazines, it had been the hard work of that division which had won those three stars for their grand old man! Thrilling with pride over the achievement of each man of them, they sprang to attention as the Admiral and his staff left the deck—and a thousand loyal hearts went with him.

At the order, "Dismissed!" Spike sought his quarters, his old uneasiness returning. It had been a great day for the Fleet—but it was not done yet for him! Timidly he approached the master-at-arms' black-list bulletin to see if his name was down there yet. But mess gear came, and then mess, yet nothing happened. The day was done; a faint spark of hope began to kindle and grow within him.

AFTER mess he sought out the Filipino boxer in the wardroom pantry to learn the news, if any.

"Say, Bolongan, how come?" he kidded. "What you' friend the topside *insurrecto* up in Admiral's cabin say they do 'bout me?"

The Asiatic grinned clear around back of his ears. "Ichi, he round all right when de Admiral come to dat paper 'bout you, Bowring! My gar, but de ol' man was mad, say Ichi. He growl an' roar; den he look at dat damn' paper 'gain.

"Bowring? Who was dees man Bowring, Ichi?" he say.

"Ichi, he laugh lak hell. 'He de guy what leek de Filipino mess-boy, Adm'l,' say Ichi.

"Oh, de man wid de legs!' laugh de Adm'l; an' den he ho-ho an' he-he an' hol' hees sides an' laugh some more, plenty, too much.

"Hee's a fighter, dat lad!' de Adm'l sing out. 'We geev heem anodder chance, Ichi.' An' den he stamp dat paper 'Disapprove.'"

Spike's heart jumped for joy. He wrung Bolongan's hand: "You *insurrectos* sure saved my life that time—on the level, you sure did!" he chortled happily, capering about the pantry.

Bolongan grinned some more. "I leek you next time, dough!" he warned Bowring merrily.

"Hope you do!" returned Spike cordially. "Say, if one of those mitts of yours ever gets home on me, it will be a haymaker, all right!"

A bugle-call interrupted them. At "pipe-down," Spike went to his hammock, but he was so happy he could not sleep. He even tried to pray, but could not remember anything appropriate save, "Now I lay me." In dumb gratitude, however, he felt that the angels who watched over the Admiral's sleep would bear up to the Throne of Grace that single word: "Disapproved!" which had given a poor sailorman another chance.



The Hand of Esau

(What has already happened:)

MANY of the wealthy residents of Rockpoint Neck were at Mrs. Joseph Tully Greene's party when it happened. Hope Robinson had just told young Roger Cresson that her father had, without explaining why, forbidden their marriage, when they were summoned inside from the veranda to take part in a fortune-telling séance conducted by a guest, Madame Bernard. And in the middle of that, after dire difficulties had been predicted for Roger Cresson, came the sound of two pistol-shots from outside, followed by the muffled explosions of a departing motorboat. And presently came the word that Wade Robinson, Hope's father, had been murdered in the library of his home, "the Quarterdeck," near by.

Among the Greenes' guests were young Raleigh Ford—a special investigator on furlough from the police commissioner's office—and Tommy Hawbaker, the local district attorney. These, with Mr. Greene, hurried over to the Quarterdeck with Robinson's butler, Harper, and presently were joined by Chief of Police Bunster, Officer

Jim Doten and the medical examiner, Dr. Silk. Mr. Robinson, they found, had been killed by a blow from a pistol-butt. A revolver lay on a table near by, with two chambers empty; the wall safe stood open; a small but heavy wooden box lay on the floor near the body.

Presently Officer Doten, who had been searching the grounds, came in with the news that he had found Jake Crandall, a queer religious crank who lived in the neighborhood, lying unconscious, apparently suffering from an apoplectic stroke, in a clump of bushes. And now Lyman Cresson, young Roger Cresson's father and Robinson's neighbor and business associate, arrived. He had called on the murdered man that same evening on a business matter—had left him only a short time before the murder must have taken place.

CHAPTER VII

SECURING the police commissioner's consent to an extension of his furlough, without pay, was a matter that took but a few moments of Ford's time,

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*A captivating three-part mystery novel
by the author of "Harmony and High
Water" and the "Bill Titus" stories.*

By
J. FRANK DAVIS

once he got the telephone connection. He came perspiring out of the booth at the exchange, to find that his friend, the reporter Bailey, in an adjoining compartment, was still talking, and told the clerk to say to the newspaper man, when he finished, that he would find him waiting in the open air just outside.

At the curb a slim, olive-skinned young man with an intelligent face and vivacious manner was standing beside the car, talking with Greene's chauffeur. He stepped back at the driver's muttered warning, but Ford said pleasantly: "Go on talking, if you want to; we won't be starting quite yet." Something in the dark young man's smile seemed familiar; Ford looked harder and placed him.

"Didn't I see you last night at Mr. Greene's?" he asked. "Yours is a very good orchestra."

"Thank you. We try to keep up to date."

"The older man—the violinist—there is a resemblance. I was wondering last evening if he was your father."

"Yes," said the youth, showing his teeth pleasantly. "He is my father." He took

from a vest pocket a card and passed it to Ford. It read: "Paolino's Elite Orchestra. Vincent Paolino. Frank Paolino. Music furnished for receptions, dances and all social occasions."

"Vincent Paolino, that is my father," he said. "Frank Paolino, that is me. My father has been playing in Rockpoint for more than twenty years."

"You were born here, perhaps?"

"Yes sir. I also play the violin," he volunteered. "I am studying, too, at the New England Conservatory. These drums and traps that I play when only a small orchestra is engaged, as last night—pouf!" He gestured contempt for the rattling accessories of modern jazz tunes.

"You had gone, as I recall it, before the party broke up—before we received the news from Mr. Robinson's."

"Yes," the young man said. "We didn't hear about it until this morning."

"I don't suppose you noticed anything unusual about Mr. Robinson's house—any strangers hanging around, or anything like that."

"No sir. My father says to me only a little while ago, when we first heard about

it! 'Frank, if we had paid particular attention to things around there, maybe we would have seen something.' But we didn't. Nothing unusual at all, and no strangers hanging around, or anything like that. For that matter,—I mentioned it to Father and Dan Sabatella when we were coming home,—I don't know when I have ever gone across that Neck Road no later than we were last night and not met anybody. Nobody in automobiles, nobody in carriages, nobody walking. From the minute we left Mr. Greene's, we never saw but two people, and both of them the other side of the Neck Road."

"Strangers?"

"Oh, no. The Mr. Cressons."

"I see. Not far from Mr. Greene's place, I suppose."

"Right in front of it, the old gentleman was—going past it—just as we came out. He had just come from Mr. Robinson's house. The paper said this morning about his being there. We met the young gentleman quite a ways this side of Robinson's. Out taking a walk in the moonlight. I guess he was."

"And nobody else all the way across the Neck Road."

"Not one—nor quite a ways this side of the Neck Road, either. I don't believe we met another automobile or anything until we were nearly up into the center of town, here. That was Mr. Bunster. He sure was trying to get speed out of that little flivver of his. By gracious, he nearly ran over us as we were coming around a corner."

"The Chief, eh! I suppose his car is so well known you could tell it in the night."

"Tell one flivver from another? No sir. We met him right at a corner, under an electric light. He was sure going some. Pretty fine police chief, that Mr. Bunster is. Gets onto the job quick, whenever anything happens, night or day. Yes sir. The speed he was getting out of that Lizzie—I says to Father: 'Papa, if Mr. Bunster did what was right, he'd pinch himself for going about twice as fast as the law allows.' Of course, when we were joking about it that way, we didn't know where he was going and what had happened."

DICK BAILEY, mopping his forehead, came out of the telephone exchange.

"One of the boys will meet Greene," he announced as Ford stepped to meet him, "and if Bunster is there, he'll spot where

he goes. If the Chief got off the train somewhere up the line, our people will get track of him there."

"You arranged to have them let you know the result?"

"I am to call the office again in an hour and a half; they'll have a report by then. Now, if you can help me get over where the procession is, I'd like to see about getting something to phone for the next edition. And meantime what is the story?"

While the car whirled them across to the Neck, Ford outlined to his friend the happenings of the night before. He carefully refrained from emphasis; the things that he told were the things that Greene, or Doctor Silk, or Bunster, or Harper the butler, had seen and would have told if Bailey could have got them alone and they possessed the ability to state facts clearly and concisely. He had just finished the story when they swung off the farther end of the Neck Road and turned toward the Quarterdeck in which were gathered, as was plainly to be inferred from the automobiles drawn up before it, empty and attended only by their drivers, not only the district attorney and the old-school detective, Mr. Story, but the trailing reporters.

"The usual bull is now being dished out," remarked Bailey, visualizing the interior scene from past experience. "After having kept the boys out while he made a careful inspection of the place and gathered all the information Hawbaker could give him, he has now invited them in to look at the room and ask questions—which he is answering *ex cathedra*. Principally he is telling them that it is a very hard case—a very difficult case indeed—but that he has a number of clues that seem to be important. 'No,'—he gave an amusing imitation of Story's manner,—'you mustn't ask me that, if you please. In the interests of justice, you understand, it wouldn't be proper for me to tell you. I shall be glad to see you young gentlemen again at five o'clock this afternoon— Unless, of course, there is some important development that I can give you before that.' Oh, I know the patter. And in the absence of much of anything else, they all have to quote him and remind the good people of the commonwealth what a great man he is."

"I have to stop at Mr. Greene's and then run down the Neck to Whalen Lawrence's," Ford said. "Where will I see you after you have heard from your office?"

"Is there any vacant seat in any of your

cars?" Bailey asked the little group of chauffeurs who had brought the reporters.

"Yes, in mine," one of them said.

"I'll join the gathering inside—Story always calls it a conference," the reporter told Ford, "and then run over to town with the rest of them and phone in what I've got. If the office hasn't heard from Bunter by then, I'll stick around until they have. Then I'll come back over here. Where is Lawrence's place?"

"On this road, nearly down to the point."

"I'll come to his house, then, unless I meet you between here and there."

BAILEY disappeared into the Quarterdeck. Ford went on into Greene's estate, and sent his name to Mrs. Greene, to whom he conveyed the news that their largest car and chauffeur had been lent for the day without consultation with her.

"It is perfectly all right—no inconvenience at all," she assured him. "I shan't be going out today. Hope is here, you know."

"I wish you would give her my sympathy," he said. "Is she bearing up well?"

"As well as one could expect. We went over to her house for a little while, and that was pretty harrowing, naturally; and of course she is anxious to see her father."

"They are going to bring him from the undertaker's back to the Quarterdeck, I hear."

"Yes. The Boston house is closed for the summer, you know; they will have the funeral here—entirely private. He will be buried with his wife, at Forest Hills. After that, Hope is coming to stay awhile with us. I suppose she will have the house closed, though we haven't discussed that as yet."

"I imagine she'll consult with Roger Cresson before she decides definitely on many things as to the future."

"Naturally! He was here a little while ago, on his way to town. He is almost as much affected as if it had been his father instead of hers. I shouldn't think, from his looks, that he had slept a wink."

"He and his father have gone to town?"

"Not his father. Mr. Cresson thought he ought to stay here today, but of course there are a great many things to be done at the office; so he sent Roger. He was too late to make the express, but was going to catch the accommodation and didn't have time to see Hope—just stopped long enough to send her his love and say he

would see her this afternoon or evening. It is odd you didn't meet him, if you came direct from the station."

"I didn't; there was an errand I had to do in town. Please give my compliments, too, to Miss Appley; that is the name, isn't it? The young lady whom I met last evening, from Texas?"

"Florence Appley, yes. Charming girl. Wasn't it odd how Madame Bernard picked out her past? She was tremendously impressed."

"Madame Bernard strikes me as a very interesting person."

"Isn't she? I hope I can get her again for later in the season. She hadn't begun to be as wonderful as she can be. It was too bad she had to be interrupted. You understand what I mean; if a terrible thing like that had to happen, it was too bad it had to happen just when it did."

"I understand. It ruined a delightful evening."

"Florence is absolutely convinced that the woman has supernatural power. Florence goes in more or less for occult things, and all that. I never have. The fortune-telling, so far as I am concerned, was an entertainment and nothing else. But it is odd how she foretold the motorboat."

"Did she? Perhaps I wasn't paying strict attention."

"It was when she was reading the cards for Roger Cresson. She said—of course I cannot remember her exact words—that important news was coming to him at night, at a party, and that somebody was going to take a journey on the water, but not he. Yet that boat, she said, would be very important to him."

"And Miss Appley figures the motorboat was of importance to Cresson?"

"Could anything be of more importance than the things that happen to his fiancée—unless they happen directly to him?"

"It was a rather remarkable prediction," Ford agreed. "It must have been fifteen minutes or more later before we heard the boat."

"Florence knew those were pistol-shots the minute she heard them," Mrs. Greene said, "and told Madame Bernard so. Madame Bernard, you may remember, thought they were an automobile back-firing. Florence said, under her breath—I heard her, being right there at the table—that they were pistol-shots, or she had never heard any. She used to live on a ranch, where it was wild and dangerous."

"Where does Madame Bernard live?"

"I don't know. That is something nobody can find out. I suppose the idea is that the more mystery there is about a seeress, the better business it is. Not a soul I have ever talked with on the whole shore, for all she is so popular all along it, has the ghost of an idea whether she is from Boston, or New York, or where. I suppose she is of French descent, from her name,—or perhaps she married a Frenchman,—but she neither looks it nor sounds it. There isn't a trace of accent. You'd think she would cultivate one, to go with her name, wouldn't you? You engage her through Ullrich, but he won't tell anything about her."

A CLOCK tinkled the hour, and Ford rose. "It was mighty good of Mr. Greene to let me have the car," he said, "and it is mighty nice of you to be so agreeable about it."

She glanced in the direction of the waiting autos in front of the Quarterdeck. "Is there anything new?" she asked. "Have the police learned anything?"

"If they have, they haven't told me."

Mrs. Greene, like a great many other of Ford's old acquaintances, usually ignored, on social occasions, the highly unfashionable profession that he had seen fit to enter; but her association with the present tragedy made her say: "If you would take hold,—Joe said he was urging you to,—I am sure you could find out something."

She, as soon as her husband arrived home, and the whole Neck, sooner or later, would learn that he had interested himself in the case; there was therefore no object in making a secret of it.

"Perhaps I shall," he smiled.

The house of Whalen Lawrence was nearly a mile away, almost under the flashing red and white beams of Rockpoint Light; and halfway there he came to Lyman Cresson's place, a much less pretentious cottage than the Quarterdeck. The motor, at his order, turned from the road into Cresson's driveway. A servant announced, after a moment, that Mr. Cresson would see Ford, and ushered him into a room that was fitted more like an office than a library. Cresson sat there at a wide flat desk. Many papers were before him; he was obviously busy. In the light of broad day he looked even older and more tired than he had the night before.

"Good morning," he said without rising.

Ford had told the servant that he wished to see him on a matter of importance; his manner indicated that he considered the call not a social one and expected the business of it to be transacted as expeditiously and with the same elimination of nonessential courtesies as though they were in his Boston office.

"Before you arrived at Mr. Robinson's house, last evening," Ford told him, without waste of preliminary words, "Mr. Hawbaker had asked me to assist him in his investigation."

"And you declined." To Ford's inquiring look, Cresson said: "Hallett told me while we were walking home."

"After talking with Joe Greene, who seems to think my assistance might be worth while, I have changed my mind. I am in a very unofficial position, because Hawbaker, after I told him I couldn't do it, naturally got help elsewhere. However, I am going to look around a bit, and if I am fortunate enough to discover anything, it will be at the service of the authorities, of course."

"The more the better," Cresson said shortly. "Have you learned anything that we didn't know last night?"

"You are the first man I have called on since I told Greene I'd try to help. . . . Who, during the past few months, has threatened Mr. Robinson?"

THE answer was sharp and prompt: "Nobody, so far as I know."

"He had enemies."

Cresson shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Who hasn't, who has a dollar?"

"You know more about his business than any other man. Who were his bitterest enemies?"

"I have been asking myself that question. I don't know of any—not any who by the farthest stretch of the imagination I could think of as killing him."

"It might have been a crank, an insane man."

"That is always a possible explanation."

"Tell me, please, what you know about threats made by Jacob Crandall."

"Nothing."

"You never heard him threaten Mr. Robinson?"

"No."

"Did he ever threaten you?"

"No."

"I understood his mania took the form of threatening all wealthy men."

"Oh, if you mean threatening us with the wrath to come, yes—often. I took your question to mean threats of personal violence."

"An insane man sometimes comes to think that he has been commanded by Heaven to carry out divine decrees," Ford suggested.

Cresson nodded. "Undoubtedly. I am not aware, however, that Crandall has ever intimated that he had any such thing in mind, and that is what you want to know, I take it. His remarks to Mr. Robinson—and to me—were straight quotations from the Bible. So far as I know, he hasn't spoken for years, except in Scriptural language."

"I would like you to tell me, if you can remember, some of the quotations he used; it might throw some light on how his mind was working. Can you recall them—approximately?"

"Such as I can recall at all I imagine I can quote exactly," Cresson said, and smiled slightly. "I haven't read the Scriptures lately, but as a boy I was well grounded. 'The love of money is the root of all evil.' 'The night cometh, when no man can work.' 'Except ye repent, ye shall perish.' I remember those."

"When, so far as you know, did he last quote Scripture to Mr. Robinson?"

"About a month ago. He called on us at the office."

"Your Boston office?"

Cresson nodded. "He dropped in on us there about once a month," he said. "This particular call a month ago wasn't out of the usual."

FORD knew the barriers that were raised between Wade Robinson and unwelcome callers in his Boston suite. "Would Mr. Robinson see him?" he asked. "Not when he could help it. Old Jake had a habit, though, of laying for us in the corridors."

"You never complained of him to the police."

"No. It wasn't even troublesome, we knew him so well. He would stand near the elevator on our floor, or sometimes on the ground floor, and speak to us as we passed. If we had sent for the police, it would have got the old man into trouble. We didn't want that. He did no harm."

"This last time he called, about a month ago—will you tell me the details?"

Cresson's manner intimated that he did

not think the interview was producing anything of value, but that the quickest way to get it over was to submit.

"Mr. Robinson and I went out to lunch together," he said. "Crandall stood in the lobby downstairs. As we stepped out of the elevator, Mr. Robinson was ahead. Crandall said to him: 'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.' Mr. Robinson said: 'Howdy-do, Crandall?' He always spoke to him as though nothing was the matter, but never stopped to listen to what he said, because you could never get anywhere doing that—and kept on toward the outer door. Crandall said to me: 'Except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish.' That was all there was to it. We went out, and he didn't follow us. He never did."

"Don't you think it could be significant that he spoke of the day of the Lord coming like a thief in the night?"

"Frankly, I don't," Cresson declared. "It was merely the text that happened to come into his mind as appropriate to preach repentance. He used them indiscriminately."

"How long have you known him?"

"Known Crandall?" Cresson hesitated, evidently to check over the years. "He came here and bought that property sixteen years ago next fall."

"You were already here?"

"Yes."

"You came here, I believe, the same year Mr. Robinson did."

"Yes."

"And Crandall, in those days, wasn't as mad as he is now."

"No."

"When did he begin to show signs of insanity?"

"He was always peculiar; I should say he didn't show signs of real insanity until after he got to going to a mission, in Boston, and became convinced it was his duty to take the Bible literally. He began to give away his property, soon after—everything except his house and lot and enough to barely live on."

"Have you any idea why he never disposed of so valuable a piece of land? Why he didn't go somewhere and live more humbly?"

"No," Cresson said. "Who can figure what reasons a crazy man has?"

He looked at the papers on his desk, then back politely into Ford's face. The gesture plainly intimated that he was de-

sirous of satisfying all the questions Ford thought it necessary or advisable to ask, but that he needed to get back to the affairs before him. Ford came to his feet and thanked him for his courtesy. "I may need to come back to you again, Mr. Cresson; I shall try not to bother you unless it is important and—"

"Any time," Cresson interrupted brusquely. "Either here or at the office, I'll see you any time."

He was back into the stack of documents on his desk before his caller reached the door.

Whalen Lawrence, Ford's host, received the news that Ford would be unable to go out that afternoon for a sail around Church Steeple Rock, with regret, and his explanation of why he couldn't go with gratification. Mr. Lawrence had little confidence in average police abilities, but great admiration for his friend's talents.

"Lord!" he exclaimed, "if they'd make up a detective force with chaps like you, we wouldn't have anything to kick about! What the blazes ever made you go into it I can't understand."

"I'm telling you that the average is mighty good, considering the pay," Ford told him seriously. "What made you go into yacht-building? You had money enough, and goodness knows your other businesses were all any one man needed."

"You haven't ever been deceived into thinking I was making money out of yacht-building, have you? If I were to tell you how badly that business runs into the red on the ledger—"

"Then I can't understand why—"

"Because I *like* it. Can't a man—" He observed the twinkle in Ford's eye, stopped, chuckled, and said: "All right. I get you. And I'll say you're doing a thorough job, the same as I'm trying to do with my boats. It's a darned good thing you happened to be here to take hold of this Robinson business. I'll have some confidence, now, that it won't be bungled."

"Don't be too confident," Ford warned him. "I may be able to help, and I may not. As a matter of fact, Bunster or Story may have the whole thing cleaned up before I get fairly started."

Whalen Lawrence said a somewhat surprising thing:

"Neither Bunster nor Story know how many men there were in that motorboat. But I do."

"You do?"

"There were three. And one of them was hit when Robinson fired at them; hit in the arm. By thunder, Raleigh, but I'm glad you've gone into this thing! It is information that ought to get to somebody in the case, and as a law-abiding citizen it was my duty to see that somebody got it, and yet I'd have been cussed if I'd have told either Bunster or Story."

"Why?"

"I don't know Story. I do know Bunster."

"How did you hear anything about that boat and who was in it?"

They were sitting on the side veranda, and Mr. Lawrence stepped toward the end of it that overlooked the beach where an elderly man with throat whiskers and rubber boots was putting about a skiff.

"Ethan!" he called. "Oh, Ethan! Come here!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE man straightened up stiffly, located the call, and came slowly toward the veranda, wiping wet hands on the hips of his trousers.

"I want you to meet Mr. Ford," Lawrence said as he reached the veranda level. "This is Ethan Dunlap, Mr. Ford."

Ford saw that the man was a typical strong, independent, self-respecting and probably stubborn native of the coast. "How do you do, Mr. Dunlap?" he said with outstretched hand.

"Pleased to meet ye," the other replied. "If you'll excuse me, I'll take the will for the deed. There's fish on 'em." He exhibited a stained right hand and let it drop.

"Ethan is a lobsterman, but he finds time to help me out a little around the place a day or two a week," Lawrence explained to Ford. "Fusses with the boats, and so forth. We've known each other a good many years—ten, at least."

"Eleven this summer. You come here thirteen years ago, and it was the second year after that that you an' me got acquainted," Dunlap amended with careful determination that any record, however unimportant, ought to be kept straight. "Cap'n Pease introduced us. It was the year after I sailed with him, on the *Helen P.*"

If Ford had not been himself a New Englander, with a knowledge of the sec-

tion wider than is gained by most of those who live only in the large cities, he would not have instantly appreciated, as he did, the relationship existing between the wealthy Mr. Lawrence and the obviously not well-to-do Mr. Dunlap. The old man was engaged for services that were in a sense menial, and he was probably receiving for it a menial wage, but he would have loafed and starved before he would have accepted the status of a servant, or allowed an employer to treat him with disrespect. Employer and employee Mr. Lawrence and he might be, and he would "Mister" the boss and expect to be called by his last name or his first, as might suit the boss' pleasure; but he was a free-born American citizen and consciously proud of it, and eleven years of pleasant and profitable acquaintanceship might easily be forgotten if Mr. Lawrence were ever to overlook their inherent equality.

Knowing this type, and liking it, Ford smiled with friendly cordiality, and the old man sensed that he had no intention of putting on airs and therefore treated him as a man and brother instead of snubbing him, as he usually did new summer visitors.

"I see you out in the *Lileana* with Mr. Lawrence yesterday," he said. "If he'll let me trim her a little different from what she is, she'll outtail anything in her class a week from next Sat'day. Yes siree-sir. She'll do as good as them there new-fangled Marconis."

"A fine boat," Ford agreed.

"But not quite as fine as she might be. If I can jest go to work an' fix that—"

Mr. Lawrence broke in good-naturedly:

"See here, Ethan. I want you to tell Mr. Ford what you told me about that motorboat."

DUNLAP'S face evidenced consternation. "Great catfish, you hadn't ought to talk about that!" he cried. "I 'specially told you—"

"It wont go any farther. I'll guarantee that. You see, Ethan, Mr. Ford ought to know. He's connected with the police department, at Boston, and—"

A physical blow couldn't have staggered Dunlap more; he stepped back until he came up against the rail; if his weather-beaten face could have shown a recession of blood, he would have gone pale. "Police!" he stammered. "He's a— I wouldn't 'a' believed it, Mr. Lawrence. I wouldn't 'a' believed, long as you an' me's

known each other, that you'd go to work and tell—"

"Didn't you hear me say I guarantee it wont go any farther. My guarantee is good, isn't it?"

"Why—yes—of course, if ye put it that way." The old man recovered some of his poise. "Of course, if you guarantee it. But you might 'a' mentioned a word or two about what ye was plannin' to do before blartin' it out. Might's well kill a feller 'n' be done with it as scare him to death." He addressed Ford: "This thing I happened to see, I didn't jest know what I oughta do about it, but I knew almighty well what I couldn't do about it, an' that was go tellin' it to officers."

"If after I hear it I can't make use of it, and if it concerns evidence," Ford began, to Lawrence, "perhaps it wouldn't be proper—"

"Yes, it would," Lawrence insisted. "You wont tell. I guarantee Ethan you wont, and I guarantee you you wont. You wont want to. There isn't any reason why you can't make use of the information in any way you need to, just so you don't drag Ethan into it. That's right, isn't it, Ethan?"

"That's right, Mr. Lawrence. I can't be dragged into it at all."

"I promise you wont. Now go ahead and tell Mr. Ford just what you saw and what you heard, and everything. Sit down. Light up, if you want to. It'll tell easier."

MR. DUNLAP gravely accepted the invitation.

"Well," he said, slowly, when his pipe had got to drawing to his satisfaction, "it was jest after the town clock over in the village had struck eleven, that I hear this boat comin'. It was moonlight, but hazy. 'Now, who's that?' says I to myself. 'What in tarnation is a powerboat comin' in here at this hour o' the night for, slippin' in that way with no lights an' the engine shut off? I guess I'll lay down,' says I—"

"Wait a minute," Lawrence interrupted. "He doesn't know where you were."

"I was in my dory, off that little beach to the side of Robinson's house. I—I've got a lobster trap off there."

"All right. Go ahead."

"I guess I'll lay down," says I, 'an' if anybody sees the dory, they'll think she's empty, anchored off here mebber,' says I. So I did so, an' that boat passed in not any farther from me than from here to

that there brown rock with the kelp on it."

"About twenty yards," said Lawrence. "Near enough to make out figures in hazy moonlight."

"There was three men in her. They weren't talkin' any. It was certain sure they were on some errand they didn't want to attract any attention about. So naturally I kep' awful quiet, thinkin' when they'd got by, mebber, I'd put about an' git out in the other direction."

"What was there about the boat that made you want to get away?" Ford asked. "Please let me get that before you go on."

"Nuthin' about her," said Dunlap uneasily. He looked at Lawrence, and Lawrence said: "Tell him. He needs to know just how things were."

"Well," the old man explained, "in that there trap, that I had been emptyin' jest before they come along, there happened to be quite a mess o' shorts."

THE explanation, to one familiar with Massachusetts fish and game laws, was adequate. Possession of one lobster whose measurement falls the slightest fraction below nine inches means a penalty of two to five dollars. Possession of twenty short lobsters—and no excuses are acceptable for such possession—means that the Commonwealth secures the use and behoof of from forty to one hundred dollars. There are no wholesale rates.

Lobstermen, searching their pots each day, throw undersized and hence presumably youthful lobsters back into the sea. At least, they do if they have entire veneration for the laws, or even lacking such respect, if they feel there is a chance some inquisitive game-officer might be at the landing when they come ashore. But short lobsters are more succulent than long ones. Wealthy cottagers are willing to pay considerably more than market prices for them. In a day when even honest lobstermen are harrowed by extreme living costs, one might forget, as he worked his pots, to turn the forbidden juveniles back into the free ocean. He might, instead, have a special trap resting on the bottom at the end of his rounds in which to drop them; then he could row ashore and look any inspector in the face and any foot rule in its marks without embarrassment or chagrin. In the still watches of the night, then, he might row secretly to that trap and gather the contraband that he dared not

bring ashore by daylight. There would be an element of risk, but it would be tempered by an assurance of unusual profit.

"I see," Ford smiled.

"So I laid down, an' that there powerboat come slidin' in with her engine shut off. When she got as near the beach as she dared to go, two men got over into the skiff an' went ashore. By mighty, I never see a boat rowed quieter! They didn't make any noise at all. 'Now, what in time are they doin',' says I, 'that they've fixed their oarlocks?' Looks to me,' says I, 'as if they was up to suthin' they hadn't no business to be up to,' says I."

Ford nodded. "Naturally."

"Well, when the skiff touched bottom, they pulled her up awful careful. Then they sneaked up across the beach. One of 'em went into that patch of sumach, near's I could make out, an' t'other one went too'ds the house."

"Robinson's house?"

"I couldn't see the house from where I lay, because of that leetle ledge, but he went in that direction. I'd thought at first, slidin' around secret like that, that the powerboat might have officers aboard, or suthin'—lookin' around to see what they could see."

"Such as lobstermen emptying their traps at nearly midnight," Lawrence suggested.

"Jes' so. But there wasn't no reason's I could see, why officers should be sneakin' up into the back yards of summer folks. So I kinder wanted to take my foot in my hand an' go home, an' I kinder wanted to stay an' see what was up, an' I was betwixt an' between, so I stayed."

"Well, in mebber five minutes I heard them two shots. I didn't know they were shots then. I knew that afterward. Right at that minute I thought it was an otter-mobile over on the road. But before anybody could 'a' had a chance to say aye, yes nor no, the feller in the powerboat had turned her over, an' she was sputterin' like a good one, and down the beach from the house come a feller runnin' as if the devil himself was after him. He makes the skiff and starts to push her into the water, an' she don't budge an inch. Seems like 'twas five minutes he was doin' this, but I don't s'pose 'twas more'n one or two, an' he calls out across the water: 'Slick! Can't you come in nearer?' He got me. I can't move this boat one-handed, an' I can't use my right arm.' He didn't shout,

you understand. It was just loud enough to carry to their boat, with the power goin'. That made me hear it, all right, even farther away, as I was, me not havin' any engine to raise a hullabaloo right in my ear.

"This Slick, in the powerboat, says back, cautious: 'I don't dast come in no nearer. Where's Joe?'"

"I don't know," says the feller on the shore. 'Mebbe he beat it the other way. I aint goin' to wait for him. To hell with him! I'm goin' to wade out a ways, and you come in as far as you can an' pick me up.'

"Jes' then the other feller hove in sight. He was kinda half runnin', all stooped over, comin' as fast as he could, I'd say, an' still not makin' any noise. He gets a hold of the skiff and pushes it off, an' this first feller that says he was hit tumbles in with him, and they didn't waste no time gettin' to the powerboat, an' the minute they was over the side, she started the screw an' went a-slammin'."

"Which way?"

"Southwest—mebbe a p'int or two south. I listened as long as I could hear her, an' she hadn't changed her course. She was headin' for somewhere down the coast."

"Slick and 'Joe,'" Ford said. "That is something."

"You didn't tell him what you heard this Joe say while he was rowing out to the motorboat," Lawrence reminded Dunlap.

"That's so. It slipped my mind. The first feller—the one that was shot—was kinda groanin' an' swearin', an' between cusses he says: 'Where the devil was you? Why didn't you come quicker? You may have balled up our whole get-away.' And Joe says: 'I'm watchin' over there in the bush, an' there's somebody else over there, an' by gosh, she's get right between me an' the boat. I start to work around him when I hear that shots, but she, by gosh, goes right toward the door where you come out an' don't see me at all. He's in there by now.'"

"You talk good Canuck dialect," Ford commented.

"I've sailed with lots of 'em," the lobsterman said modestly.

"Was there a woman, do you suppose?" Lawrence asked. "Or was that 'she' just a French-Canadian's mix-up with pronouns?"

"Can you repeat it again, just as he said it?" Ford asked.

DUNLAP did so, in the same words. "There wa'n't any woman, I don't believe," he gave as his own opinion. "He just tangled up his *she's*, *he's* an' *it's*, like they're pretty sure to do when they're excited. After he'd said 'she,' he said, 'He's in there.' He meant the same feller."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," Ford told him. "Well, we've got two names out of three. Slick was in the boat, and Joe is a Canadian who speaks broken English, at least when he's excited. Unfortunately, 'Joe' is about as common a French-Canadian name as there is."

"Now, you aint goin' to get me mixed up in this at all," Dunlap urged anxiously. "Mr. Lawrence promised, you know."

"Couldn't you appear in it if Mr. Lawrence or I would take care of whatever fine there was in connection with the lobsters? Your worry is mostly the matter of the fine, isn't it? I have always understood a man doesn't lose much reputation among his friends and neighbors in one of these shore towns if he gets caught with short lobsters."

"Not with us older folks," Dunlap said, "but there's a lot of young folks nowadays that are narrer. That aint jest it, though. If Hank Bunster was to find this out,—an' he would by my own say-so if I give evidence,—what he'd do would be a-plenty. You see, we had a leetle political campaign here in Rockpoint last fall. The whole town got considerable het up. An' I didn't vote with Hank's crowd. My boy, Ethan Junior, has got a pretty good job with the tax assessors, an' they'd like nothin' better'n to take it away, but they aint quite dared to. If they could say I was a confirmed offender, as ye might call it—" He paused and naively admitted: "You see, they aint had nothin' on me for two or three years, me bein' pretty careful an' all that; but first 'n' last, to tell ye the truth, I been caught handlin' shorts six times."

"That does make a complication," Ford agreed. "Well, I've got to keep Mr. Lawrence's promise, and of course I will. I hope it wont come to a point where I'll be asked where I got my information, but if I am, I'll protect you. I can see," he told Lawrence, "why you would promise that I wouldn't involve Mr. Dunlap, because you could be certain I wouldn't make use of any information I secured under your roof as a guest; but I don't see why you were so sure I wouldn't want to."

"Best reason in the world," Lawrence chuckled. "Didn't you mention that that lobster you had at dinner last night was one of the best you ever ate? It was one of Ethan's shorts."

"The receiver is as bad as the thief, and ignorance no excuse! Heaven deliver an officer from his law-breaking friends!" Ford ejaculated. "You're safe, Mr. Ethan."

"If you happened to want a broiled live, say, tomorrow," Dunlap insinuated, "those leetle ones I had last night are still in that trap. It sort o' seemed to me after that powerboat had gone that mebbe the excitement, with shootin' an' so forth, would get folks up, and there might be somebody would see me come ashore. And they might wonder where I'd been an' mebbe go to snoopin' round, an' all that, so I stopped an' put 'em all back."

"No," Ford declared, laughing, "I'll be no party to it with malice aforethought."

"I'll bring some that are reg'lar length, then," the lobsterman said, and wrinkled a whole side of his face with a wink at Lawrence that he plainly believed Ford could not see. "Tomorrow mornin'."

FORD again reassured Dunlap that he would not be enmeshed in any net of justice, and set out in his car in the direction of the Neck Road and town. He met Dick Bailey, coming fast in a hired flivver, before he reached the Quarterdeck, and they both got down and stepped to the side of the road, where their drivers could not overhear.

"Bunster went through to Boston," Bailey said. "When he got there, he went to police headquarters, where he had a talk with a South Boston doctor named Harvin. One of our men who can get things at headquarters, because he never spills anything they tell him until it's ripe, got the inside of it. About three o'clock this morning a man waked Doctor Harvin up—his office is in his house, not far from the waterfront—and wanted to get his arm dressed. He had a bullet wound just below the right shoulder, with a fracture. The bullet went in from the back."

"He was foxy. If he had told some story about shooting himself accidentally, as lots of fellows would have, the wound would have shown him to be a liar. But he said he was shot by a friend, and he had the friend there to prove it. They had a plausible story about cleaning a pistol. The friend was terribly solicitous

and sorry, and all that. So the doctor fixed the man up, took his pay, let them go and went back to bed. If a policeman hadn't seen them coming out of Harvin's house, nobody would have heard of it. This officer didn't pay any especial attention; there was nothing to make him think it was anything more than some broken-arm emergency case. He wasn't on duty; if he had been, he would have been looking for such a case, because a general alarm had been given to all the patrolmen as soon as headquarters got Bunster's phone-message. He had just got up and was on his way to his station-house to report at four o'clock. It was after six before he happened to hear about the general alarm. By that time, naturally, the men had had time to get anywhere."

"The names they gave Dr. Harvin wouldn't be of any value, of course."

"But he gave a good description of one of them; the other seems to have been so ordinary-looking and -acting that he hardly noticed him. The one that was shot has an unusually long jaw, and one side of it is marked with powder-grains. That fits the description of a yegg named Peter Creel, alias Soapy."

"Alias Syracuse Pete," Ford said. "I know him."

"Does he live in Boston?"

"Yes. He has been a sort of leader, lately, of a little waterfront gang. We've never had anything on him since he came to Boston. He did a bit in Sing Sing for some safe-breaking job, and came here when he got out. He has sworn he was going straight, and as there hasn't been anything up to now to prove he wasn't, he hasn't been bothered. They'll get him, I think, if he is still in or around Boston, and he wouldn't be likely to try to go very far; a man with his arm in a sling is too easily remembered. Are they looking for anyone else in particular?"

"No. The other fellow was just a youngish tough guy with a dirty sweater who talked out of the corner of his mouth—which is a good description of quite a few hundred characters known to the police."

"He didn't speak with any foreign accent?"

"I don't believe so. There was nothing said about it."

Ford thought frowningly. "The chances are ten to one," he said after a moment, "that Langevin went straight home, and

that he will stay there under cover until it blows over."

"Langevin! Who is he?"

"Joe Langevin," Ford told him, "is a smart native of Quebec who has done one or two short terms on the island—for minor offenses, not as serious as motorboat piracy. He was a bartender once upon a time down on Atlantic Avenue, and I seem to remember that Peter Creel used to hang out quite a bit at that saloon. There's a good chance that he was the third one."

"I don't get you," Bailey protested. "What makes you think there were three?"

"I picked it up since I saw you. Keep it to yourself for the present. In the meantime—you can't print it, but it will keep you from getting off on the wrong track—I'll tell you that the men in that motorboat didn't kill Robinson. Have you a timetable? I want to get the next train for Boston."

CHAPTER IX

THE reporters, having seen all there was to be seen, and heard all that Hawbaker and Story had to tell them, had scattered to search for information in their own and several ways. A diagram of the library, for such official use as might develop, had been carefully made. It had been determined that neither on the lignum-vitæ box nor the pistol with the two discharged cartridges were there any distinguishable finger-prints except Robinson's. Harper, Thomas, and Greene's man Raymond, had been examined and cross-examined until they were in a condition of nervousness and uncertainty which well-nigh precluded their stating their own names and birthplaces with any degree of certainty; yet their stories of the night's events remained quite unshaken. In mid-afternoon Detective Story and Hawbaker sat in the district attorney's office in the County Courthouse and summed up the results of the day's labor.

"The starting of the motorboat," Story said, "could have been a coincidence, but I don't believe it. That boat had something to do with what happened there in the library, but I feel sure you are right in thinking that whoever killed Robinson didn't go away in it. All the witnesses agree that immediately after the shots came the sound of the motor-explosions, and that they died down very soon as the boat

went farther and farther from shore. It seems to be generally admitted that the boat was well off shore when Harper came to the library door and listened and heard Robinson say: 'What the devil do you want?' No, the murderer didn't leave in that boat; but he might have come in it."

"The motive!" Hawbaker fretted. "If we could get even a hint as to the motive—"

"Money; woman; hate," Story declared sententiously. "Somewhere in those three words you can find the motive of nine hundred and ninety-nine murders out of a thousand."

"Nothing was stolen, so far as we can see, and there is not the slightest evidence that there was any attempt to steal."

"I want to know what is in that yellow box," the detective said. "Why did Robinson have it in his hands? What is in it, if anything, that somebody wanted?"

"If he wanted it, why didn't he take it?"

"There are at least two plausible reasons. The box was under Robinson when he fell, and the murderer was too much in a hurry to make his get-away to stop for it—"

"When that was what he committed the murder for?"

MR. STORY'S face expressed displeasure at the interruption. "Or he saw how badly the box was smeared, and didn't dare take the chance of staining his hands and clothes."

Hawbaker shook his head. "It sounds far-fetched. I am much more inclined to think the presence of the box was only accidental. It happened to be on the table and he swept it off."

"What was it doing on the table? It wasn't kept there. It was probably kept in the safe."

"He might have got it out to look at whatever was in it—before the murderer came—before the shots were fired."

"With no way of opening it," Story commented. "The key is not on his key-ring. It isn't loose in his pockets. It isn't in any of the compartments or drawers of the safe. It isn't anywhere in that room. Why should he get out a box that he had no way of opening?"

Hawbaker, a little nettled, advanced an explanation that came to him suddenly: "But suppose he had opened it. Suppose, afterward, he had locked it. Suppose the key were lying there on the table. The murderer would have taken it."

"Taken a key to unlock a box that he didn't have and didn't intend to take?"

"He could have picked up the key first, and seen what shape the box was in, and decided not to risk taking it, later. He already would have slipped the key into his pocket."

"Let's find out what is in the box," Story hedged, this theory of Hawbaker's being obviously reasonable. "It needs to be done as soon as possible, and without the whole world knowing it. If we had a key, we wouldn't need to say anything to anybody. As it is, I suppose we'll have to get some sort of court order. Have you made any inquiries about his will?"

"It is in the hands of the Interstate Trust, which is named as executor, and will be offered for probate the day after the funeral."

"We can't wait. We must get authority to break it open. The will will be probated in Boston, of course. If the Interstate Trust and I went quietly to the probate judge tomorrow morning, explaining this, I don't think there would be much difficulty getting an order without advertising it all over the State."

WITH this Hawbaker agreed, saying he would go with them, a proceeding to which Story made no objection, although plainly he thought it unnecessary. "Our office," he said, "could get a locksmith who would keep things to himself—although, for that matter, I shouldn't tell him what I found in it. I could take it to the State House."

There had been three too many I's in Story's speech to please the district attorney. "It has to remain in my possession in case Doctor Silk should call for it at the inquest," he said. "You can get a locksmith and have him come here. I wouldn't care to take it to Boston."

Story appreciated that he had made a tactical blunder. "Quite right," he said smoothly. "You are quite right. We'll have it opened here in this office, and whatever we find in it will be right here to be put back into your safe."

"If we can get the order early tomorrow, we can get back here and have it opened in the forenoon," the younger man said, mollified. His thoughts returned to their earlier channels. "The box was never kept in sight, but always, we presume, in the safe," he said. "Either we have to believe that Robinson got it out and that the

person who wanted what is in it arrived at just that lucky moment, or we have to believe that Robinson went and got it for him,—which is about the limit of improbability,—or the box didn't have anything to do with the murder at all."

Mr. Story was silent, but the expression of his face implied that he could think of many possibilities in the premises that naturally would not enter Hawbaker's mind at all.

"All this idea that somebody might have wanted to get possession of this box," Hawbaker argued, "is based on the theory that robbery was attempted. We all know that there are at least two other common motives—you just mentioned them yourself. You will agree, I guess, that there is small chance of any woman angle to the case." Story nodded; Robinson's vices had run in financial grooves. "But how about the third motive? Hate—including, of course revenge."

"And sudden anger," Story said. "If we should find that anybody was in that library who had a grudge or a grievance—we may hear that somebody has threatened Robinson recently, or that Robinson had injured somebody who was seen in that neighborhood last night; the bare fact of old Wade's injuring somebody wouldn't be much of a clue by itself; getting people's ill will was too much his regular business."

Tommy Hawbaker twisted his chair and looked out of the window, his eyes on the main street, pleasantly busy with the afternoon comings and goings of citizens and summer visitors. He fell into deep thought, which Story, himself endeavoring to recall if, in their discussion, they had overlooked any significant point, did not interrupt. After a long five minutes, Hawbaker spoke.

"I have been puzzling, all day, about what I ought to do regarding a matter that—" He hesitated uncomfortably, and Story waited, sensing an embarrassed note in the young man's voice. "At a private house, as a guest," Hawbaker went on, "I overheard something. It is impossible it could have had anything to do with it, and yet—"

"Nothing is impossible," Story said, when Hawbaker seemed to have forgotten that his sentence was unfinished.

"My obligation to the State—"

Again the district attorney left what he started to say unsaid.

"Who said it?"

Hawbaker turned sharply from the window. "Roger Cresson. . . . See here, Mr. Story, you're a much older man than I. You've had wider experience in such things than I have. I have been hesitating all day as to what I ought to do. I want advice. Can I talk to you in confidence?"

"Certainly," the detective said gravely.

"I overheard bits of a conversation that Roger Cresson was having. It was at eleven o'clock last night, on the piazza at Joe Greene's. The talk didn't make any impression on me at the moment, but—" He interrupted himself to exclaim: "It is quite impossible! He wouldn't have said it to—he wouldn't have said it to the person he was talking to."

"Wouldn't have said what?"

"What he said. I mean, if it had had any significance—if it could have had anything to do with what happened."

"If you want my advice, hadn't you better tell me what you overheard?"

"I heard Wade Robinson mentioned. A little later I heard Cresson say, 'It is outrageous. It is insulting. I am going to see him now.' I wasn't eavesdropping; I didn't hear much of the conversation; it just happened that he raised his voice. A little later he said: 'He could order me out, but he couldn't refuse to hear what I have to say.'"

"And Robinson's name had been mentioned?"

"No. Not his name. But I knew whom they were talking about."

"Who was the other person?"

"I don't want to bring a lady's name into this."

"Miss Robinson?"

It was a guess, based on nothing more than Story's knowledge that Cresson and Hope Robinson were engaged and that she had been at the Greene party. He knew by Hawbaker's manner, although the district attorney did not reply directly, that he had guessed correctly.

"It is perfectly possible," Hawbaker said, "that they had stopped talking about Robinson and were speaking of some one else when he said those things. Some time had elapsed. And yet—he said he was going to see him at once. 'Now,' he said."

"But did he?"

"I don't know. But he left the room where the rest of us were, not fifteen minutes later. I didn't think anything of it at the moment, but I saw him slip out."

"And how long was he gone?"

"I don't know. When we got word that Robinson was dead, I hurried over there. I hadn't seen Roger come back before then, but I don't say he hadn't."

"We can find that out, probably," Story said. "Did Miss Robinson seem to agree that he ought to go wherever it was he was going, or did she try to dissuade him?"

"I didn't hear anything that she said, at all, except early in the conversation, when I caught the word 'father.' But they didn't seem to be disagreeing."

"Did he speak to her when he left the room? I mean, was there anything in her manner to indicate that he was leaving on some prearranged errand?"

"She wasn't near him. She was sitting at one side of the room, with a bunch of girls. He was away back near the door."

"This talk you overheard—where was it?"

"On the piazza—and on the way in. It was just before the fortune-telling program began."

"Do I understand they separated when they got into the house from the piazza and sat on opposite sides of the room? Had they quarreled, do you suppose?"

"They gave no indications of it. I was close to them when she left him. No, I don't think they had quarreled. She smiled at him, I think, when she left him."

"And he? Was he smiling?"

HAWBAKER tried to remember; he had been paying more attention to the smiles of the attractive Miss Appley of Texas than to the facial expressions of either Roger Cresson or Hope Robinson. "I can't say," he admitted, "—not positively. But I think he was scowling. I wouldn't swear to it, though."

"Let's get at this from the beginning. Will you tell me where they stood, and where you were, and exactly what you heard? All in strict confidence, of course," he put in, when Hawbaker seemed loath to do it. "We can talk over afterward what use ought to be made of it, if any."

So Hawbaker, who liked both Hope Robinson and Roger Cresson, but took his oath of office with proper seriousness, told him.

"It is absolutely impossible that Miss Robinson could have thought he was going to have serious trouble with her father," he said at the end of his story. "I mean,

could have thought that he would injure him. And I believe it is equally impossible that Roger could have intended anything of the sort when he left Greene's. But if Robinson had insulted him some way,—and the Lord knows old Wade insulted half the world, when he felt like it,—and if he went over to the house to have it out, they *could* have had a quarrel that reached the point—”

“You have a witness to what you heard, if it should become necessary to verify this,” Story mused.

“I don't want to have to ask her to verify it,” Hawbaker protested. “I don't want to come into it at all. It doesn't seem fair. It seems like using my social friendships to advance my official work.”

“I see your viewpoint,” Story said. “It is a good one—unless the time comes when we cannot get at the bottom of things without your evidence and the young lady's who was with you. In the meantime we must try to find out exactly where Cresson went when he left Greene's. Was there anybody out on the piazza when he slipped away who might have noticed which way he went?”

“I don't believe so. Greene had been out and rounded up all the stragglers about the place.”

“Did he go before the pistol-shots?”

“No. Just a minute or two afterward.” Hawbaker had no difficulty in recollecting this, because Miss Appley was at Madame Bernard's little table when the firing and the motorboat were commented upon, and Cresson's departure occurred after the Texas girl had left Hawbaker's side.

“If we could find out which way he went—” Story began, frowning, when Hawbaker, his eyes on the opposite sidewalk, exclaimed:

“There he is. His car is stopping in front of the post office. He must have just got in from Boston.”

“We'll ask him,” Story decided. “Run and get him.”

“But that would necessitate telling him that I—”

“Tell him I want to see him, and let me do the talking. I'll keep you and the young lady with you entirely out of it. I'll give him to understand that somebody saw him go to Robinson's house.”

ROGER CRESSON came in with Hawbaker three or four minutes later, and the district attorney, striving to conceal

mental discomfort, introduced him to the detective.

“I was going to try to see you this evening,” Story said. “I want to ask you a question or two. Sit down, will you? Was anybody else with Wade Robinson last night, when you got there?”

If Hawbaker had really thought there was a chance Roger Cresson had not gone from Greene's house to Robinson's, Roger's face at this sudden jolting question would have convinced him to the contrary. It plainly registered consternation. Cresson caught his breath. He opened his mouth to speak, closed it, wet his lips and hesitated. Then he surprised them.

“Yes,” he said.

“Who?” asked Story.

“I don't know,” Roger told him, and Story was gratified to observe that the young man was not a good liar.

“You mean he was a stranger? Didn't Robinson say who he was?”

“I didn't see Robinson.”

“Why?”

“He was busy.”

“One of the servants told you he was engaged?”

It was a question to trap him, but he did not walk into the snare.

“I didn't see any of the servants,” he replied.

Story and Hawbaker waited for him to amplify this, but he did not. Taken by surprise, he was striving to collect his thoughts and decide what to say and what not to say; this much was as evident as though they had been able to see his mental processes. He looked from the detective to Hawbaker and back again. “I didn't see either Robinson or any of the servants,” he reiterated.

“You left Mr. Greene's house immediately after those revolver-shots and went to Robinson's. You went in through the long window that opens on the side piazza.” Story did not give this the inflection of a question; he stated it as a fact. The natural thing would be for Cresson to think some one had seen him.

“No,” Roger said. “You are mistaken. I didn't go in.”

“Why?”

“Because there was some one with him. I heard them talking.”

“Where were you when you heard them?”

“Just at the piazza steps. I turned away and didn't go in.”

STORY'S eyes did not leave Cresson's face. "Where did you go?"

"I took a walk. I went a little way back toward Greene's, and then passed Robinson's house and walked down toward the Neck Road. I don't get exactly what you are driving at, Mr. Story. I certainly didn't see or hear anything that had anything to do with—with Mr. Robinson's death. If I had, wouldn't I have told you or some of the other officers long ago? Last night?"

"Where were you last night—after the murder, I mean?" It was Tommy Hawbaker who asked this question, and his intent was friendly. He had not returned to Greene's house after the tragedy, and he had no doubt Roger Cresson had. He was surprised when the young man replied unconvincingly: "I didn't hear of the murder until long after it happened. I got to walking,—it was moonlight, you know,—and before I got back it had happened. I went home."

"Who told you about the murder?" demanded Story.

"I heard it," was the unsatisfactory answer. "I heard somebody call out to somebody else that Mr. Robinson had been shot and killed. They were in automobiles."

"Where?"

Cresson frowned, as though trying to place as nearly as possible the exact spot. "I should say it might have been halfway across, or maybe three-quarters."

"You mean across the Neck Road—in this direction?"

The youth nodded. "That's right."

"What did you do then, please?"

"Why, I went home."

"Past Robinson's house. Did you stop?"

"No. I kept on home. There seemed to be people enough there; I didn't see that I could be of any service."

Detective Story leaned forward and snapped a question into Cresson's face: "Why didn't you stop?"

If Cresson had been concealing nothing, they both felt he would have resented Story's manner. He did not. He swallowed hard and said: "I told you. I didn't see how I could be of any help."

"Which way did you go when you came out of Robinson's library?" the detective shot at him.

"But I didn't come out of his library. See here, Mr. Story! Just what do you mean to imply by that?"

"I'm implying nothing. I know a whole lot about what happened last night, and and I'm going to find out more. I want the straight story of what happened after you left Greene's house. What did you go to see Robinson about?"

"It was a little business matter that I should have reported to him at the office. I suddenly remembered it."

"No other reason?"

"No." Again it was obvious that he would have a long way to go to attain his father's ability to avoid truth with impenetrable features.

"You had had no quarrel with him? You and he had had no disagreement—no words?"

"None whatever."

Hawbaker frowned a warning not to go too far into this, and Story shifted his attack.

"You went to the entrance of that library. You heard voices, you say. You went for a walk. Tell us, when you found Robinson had been murdered, why you didn't stop and tell somebody what you overheard."

Cresson considered this and came to a decision.

"Of course I see what all this means," he said. "I'd make a rather rotten lawyer if I didn't. You think I went away and didn't stop there after I heard of the murder because I didn't want to give evidence as to what I heard. Well, gentlemen, you are exactly right. And the reason I didn't was because what I heard sounded as if it might have something to do with the murder, and I don't believe it had. I don't believe it was anything but the ravings of a crazy man. I have heard him rave more violently than that, and no one was ever hurt. So I thought it over and decided not to tell it and perhaps build up evidence against a poor unfortunate innocent man."

"Who was it, and what did he say?" demanded Story.

"I can't swear to who it was, because I didn't see him, although I felt sure enough I recognized his voice. I had just put my foot on the lower step of the piazza when I heard him, and I turned and went away because what I wanted to see Mr. Robinson for could wait. I didn't hear Mr. Robinson speak at all. The voice that I heard was loud, but not angry. It was more like a man making a speech—or preaching a sermon."

"What did he say?" Story demanded again.

"It would sound worse than it really was to anybody who didn't know that it was just a quotation out of the Bible," Cresson told them earnestly. "That is why I didn't want to do him an injustice. What I heard him say was: 'Thou fool! This night thy soul shall be required of thee.'"

CHAPTER X

TO a cautious tapping, the door of a third-floor tenement flat in Boston's North End opened the merest crack, and the woman who held the knob while she peered out into the twilight of the hallway went stumbling as Raleigh Ford put his foot into the opening, thrust with his shoulder against the door and stood inside the room.

"I want to see Joe," he informed her brusquely.

The woman, young and boldly good-looking, stroked an elbow while she gained time. "For w'y you don' tak' an ax w'en you come on folks' house?" she demanded loudly. "If you jus' say you are police an' want to come in, you don' have to go bus' t'rough any door. I open heem quick enough. We aint do no'ting for w'y we should be 'fraid de police, Joe nor me."

"Then he doesn't need to be afraid," Ford replied in an equally loud tone. Twice the woman had mentioned police, for the benefit of listening ears, no doubt. "Come on out, Joe, wherever you are. No use trying to go down the fire-escape; there's a man standing at the bottom of it."

Joe Langevin appeared promptly in a doorway.

"How do, Meester Ford?" he said, striving to speak in a tone of careless injured innocence. "W'at's all de excitement?"

"All right, Tom," Ford called over his shoulder, and a heavily built young man slipped in from the hallway and closed the door. "You're wanted at headquarters, Joe."

"Say, w'at's Joe do for get pinched?" the woman cried. "He aint do nothin'. Joe's been goin' straight ever since las' tam he been down on d' Island. He aint do nothin'."

"Where was he last night?"

"Right here in dis house."

"Dat's right, Meester Ford," Langevin

said. "She has tol' you. I'm right here all las' night. Somebody say I aint?"

"Hold out your hands," Ford commanded; and Detective Lederer, his companion, had to step in front of the woman, whose protests threatened to shift from mere vocalization to physical interference.

"You shut up and keep quiet," snapped Langevin in French. "You don't help any by starting a battle. I haven't done anything. They haven't got anything on me." Presumably he added the last two sentences on the chance that one of the detectives might understand his tongue.

"You don' need those t'ing," he protested as Ford snapped handcuffs on his wrists. "W'at for you need to fasten me up, two beeg men lak you, w'en I'm willin' for go along quiet an' no trouble?"

"It's customary in murder cases," Ford said.

"W'at's dat?" the man cried. "W'at's dat nonsense? W'at damn' fool says I got anything to do wit any murder?"

"No good, Joe. We've got the evidence. You didn't do it yourself, of course—we know that. But you watched outside while Soapy went in. That makes you an accessory before the fact. Accessories go to the chair along with the actual murderers."

"Say! Listen, Meester Ford! You got me all wrong."

"We've got you all right," Ford smiled. "Soapy Creel did the job; you watched outside; and Slick tended the boat. All right; we'll go down and send for the wagon."

"Wait!" the woman put in excitedly. "You can't put dat t'ing on my Joe. He aint never do anything so bad lak dat. Somet'ing he's did, sometam, but not nothing bad lak keel anybody." She slipped into French: "Tell them. That's the only chance. Tell them."

"Dat's right, w'at she's say," Langevin cried earnestly. "Some leetle t'ing bad I might 'a' done, sometam, but I aint never get mix' up in no beeg t'ing lak dat."

FORD grinned sardonically. "I suppose you claim you weren't at Rockpoint last night. You didn't go ashore with Soapy and wait in the bushes while he went into the house. You don't know anything about his having a fight with Wade Robinson, and getting shot himself before he killed him."

"Listen, Meester Ford!" cried Langevin

desperately. "If dat Soapy Creel keel dis Robinson feller, she's a liar to me, dat's all. Listen! I'm wit' him; I ain't goin' deny dat. By gracious! I ain't never got mix' up in no murder, an' if dat Soapy lies to me w'en he says he beat it as soon as he see dat feller, an' dat feller shoot at heem w'ile he's makin' to get away, he gets w'at is comin' to heem an' I don't care, me. Listen, Meester Ford! If I tell you all the troot an' don't go to keep not'ing back, an w'en I'm t'rough you t'ink w'at I say is so, what you do? Will you mak' it easy for me as you can?"

"I'll promise that you wont be charged with murder, or being accessory to it—if you tell the truth and don't keep anything back. But you've got to come clean. We know a whole lot about what happened last night, and if you hold out on us—"

Langevin's words tripped over each other.

"So help my God, I tell it jus' like she is. Dat Soapy an' Slick Murray an' me, like you said, we go on dat place to break a box an' not wan t'ing else. W'en I hear in dat paper 'bout dere is a dead man, dis mornin', b'lieve me, I'm the mos' surprise' feller you ever see. Ask Rosie."

"Dat's sure t'ing," she put in convincingly. "I never see heem so excite' all tam we been marry. And I'm excite' too, an' scairt. We've talk it over if mebbe he better not go an' let you police have him, an' tell d' troot—but we t'ink not. All day he's say: 'Soapy didn' keel dat man; I'm sure she didn't. If I t'ink he did an' lie to me, I'm damn' if I wouldn' squeal.' *Oui!* Dat's w'at he's say all day."

"Go ahead," Ford said to the prisoner. "Tell it all. If you leave anything out, you'll be sorry."

LANGEVIN told it all. Neither Ford nor Lederer, when he had finished, had the slightest doubt that he had unburdened himself of every fact he knew that could have a bearing on the Rockpoint tragedy.

Their gang had been working with a motorboat, robbing first untended small-craft along the North Shore, and later, as they became emboldened by success, houses that were temporarily vacant. Creel, as his sobriquet of "Soapy" implied, was by profession a "box-man," a safe-breaker. He wearied of the routine of small robberies; yet he had no desire to undertake a really big safe-burglary; he was only one of the small-fry in his branch of crime,

without the intelligence to initiate and carry out an important break. They had entered two or three summer homes, when the occupants were away, and made fairly satisfactory hauls of cash and jewelry from strong-boxes with simple combinations.

Creel learned that the Robinson house would be unoccupied on the previous night. How he learned it, Langevin didn't know. He supposed Creel's information came from some underground of friendship in the North Shore towns. Everybody, Creel was assured, would be at Greene's party. If servants were in the house, they never entered the library unless called. If the break was made when the party was at its height, there was almost no chance of interruption.

Soapy knew his terrain. They came in the motorboat to a point just off the beach at the side of the Quarterdeck, and Creel and Langevin went ashore. Langevin was to be the lookout. He discovered, almost immediately, that every servant was over on Greene's estate. Creel boldly entered the library.

From that point the story became hearsay. Soapy, in the long open window, saw the room to be lighted and untenanted. He knew the location of the wall-safe, but could not see it from where he stood; if he had, its being open would have aroused his caution. He tiptoed into the room. Wade Robinson rose from a couch that was hidden by a screen in the farther corner. Soapy turned and fled.

He had passed through the window and reached the edge of the veranda, when Robinson, from somewhere inside the room, fired twice. The first shot went wild. The second found Creel's arm. He staggered, dashed on down to the beach and tried to launch their skiff. Every second he expected more shots, a shouted alarm, running feet, capture.

AT this point Langevin's narrative again became first hand.

He was crouched in the sumach-patch, trying to look in two directions at once,—toward the street and over into Greene's grounds, where a group of servants were talking,—when he became conscious of a movement not far distant from him in the bushes. He was undecided, for a moment, whether it was made by a man or a dog, and he hesitated to whistle an alarm. While he was peering in the direction of the sound, Creel came leaping through the

French window, and the shots cracked, and with this disturbance, the rustlings in the sumach became more audible, and Langevin saw that a man stood less than a hundred feet from him.

In a panic he stooped to the ground and began to circle to get to the beach. The man stood for a moment, a vague, terrifying figure to the Canadian. Then he moved toward the house. He was muttering. Once his words became loud enough to carry distinctly to Langevin's ears. Joe could not quote him exactly, but came near enough to it for Ford to understand that what he said was: "'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

In the French window a figure appeared. Langevin supposed at the moment it was Robinson, although he didn't know Robinson by sight and was now more interested in reaching the boat than in striving to identify one who was necessarily an enemy, whoever he was. He had supposed it was Robinson until he read in the paper that Robinson was killed; since then he had wondered if Soapy lied to his confederates regarding what took place in the library.

Langevin thought the figure would shoot again, but it didn't. Its attention, instead, seemed to shift to the man who was striding across the lawn, the one who had been prowling about in the sumach. The man held up a hand, as though commanding something—perhaps that the other stop shooting; Langevin could only guess as to that. At any rate, the man from the bushes came between the man in the window and the beach. He stepped up on the veranda to the window, motioning Robinson—if it was Robinson—inside. If he said anything, either while crossing the lawn or after he had reached the veranda, Langevin could not hear it. He wasn't listening, for that matter; his faculties were concentrated on getting to the skiff noiselessly, in the shortest possible time.

He found Creel unable to launch the boat, and heard him call to Slick Murray that he would desert Langevin if he could. "To hell with him!" Creel had cried when Murray asked where Joe was. This rankled. He took Creel to task for it after they were safe away from shore and his wound had been temporarily fixed up. Creel said he thought Joe had already escaped, but it still rankled. The incident explained why Langevin and his wife had seriously discussed "squealing."

They reached South Boston, where Murray went with Creel to find a doctor. Langevin left them at the landing and came home. He had heard nothing from the others since, and had not expected to; they had agreed not to communicate with one another until the excitement died down. Creel thought Robinson had not got a good look at his face. They had no reason to anticipate a bigger hue and cry than would follow any attempted robbery of a millionaire's summer home.

"Where was Creel going after he got patched up?" Ford asked.

"No, I don't lak to tell dat," protested Langevin.

"The whole business, if you want us to help you get off light," Ford insisted. "He didn't consider you when he was trying to launch that skiff."

"Well—she's go to his cousin's house in Woburn. His cousin is name' Jerry Smit'."

"One more thing: you haven't described the man who passed you in the bushes. You must have got a fair look at him as he went across the lawn."

"Only from in back," Joe said. "But he's wan beeg man—not so beeg wide, but tall feller. He's look lak mos' any odder man, except he don' wear no hat."

"Did he have one in his hand?"

"No. I'm sure of dat. He's wear no hat on his head or in his hand, too. And he aint got no hair on his head, none to spik of. A more balder-headed man I don' b'lieve I never see."

"All right," Ford nodded, "we'll be moving along."

Then he spoke out of hearing of the prisoner and his wife, to Detective Lederer:

"You don't need me. Book him on some noncommittal charge that won't attract any attention from the reporters, and get after Creel and Murray. I've got just about time to catch the last train for Rockpoint. If you don't find Creel at Woburn, call me at Whalen Lawrence's house. I'll know, if I haven't heard from you before morning, that you got him."

"Joe is telling the truth. We'll get him," promised Lederer.

CHAPTER XI

SOME distance ahead of him, as Ford went out from the North Station waiting-room into the trainshed, he saw Chief of Police Bunster, alone, moving

toward the train. The Chief had obviously had a hard day; weariness was written in his dragging feet and sagging shoulders. He went up to the smoking-car, took a seat near the front, and an acquaintance saw him and dropped down beside him. Ford found a seat in the same car, some distance behind them.

Bunster's acquaintance left the train at a station seven or eight miles from Rockpoint. The car, crowded when it left Boston, now held not more than a dozen passengers, none of whom were sitting either directly behind or in front of the Chief. Ford went down the aisle and slipped into the just-vacated seat.

"Hello!" Bunster said cheerfully, making room. "I didn't see you. Where'd you get on?"

"Boston. What progress?"

"Fair," replied the Chief, his voice plainly showing that he considered it more than fair. "You'll hear something by tomorrow."

"Expect to get them tonight, eh?"

It occurred to the Chief that if Ford had been to Police Headquarters, he was probably familiar with the alarm sent out for Creel's arrest, and in any event there was no reason for keeping the matter secret from him, seeing that practically every other member of the Boston police force was aware of it.

"That's up to you fellers in Boston," he said. "Chances look good to me."

"They look good to me too. I think you'll hear before morning that they've got Creel. I just took in one of his partners, not half an hour before train time. His name is Langevin."

"The feller with the sweater?"

"No. That one's name is Murray. There were three of them."

Bunster forgot his weariness. "Say, that's great news!" he exclaimed. "I guess old man Story—"

"But I've got some news that won't please you so much, Chief. You can have Creel and his partners for technical breaking and entering a building in the nighttime with intent to commit larceny, or you can turn them over to some of these other towns where they really made a haul; but they didn't have anything to do with the murder of Wade Robinson."

"They didn't!"

"Not a thing in the world. They had been gone minutes—I don't know how many—before Robinson was killed. Lange-

vin confessed the whole business, so far as he knew anything about it. Neither he nor Creel nor Slick Murray ever knew Robinson had been murdered until they saw it in the papers this morning."

"That's what they say, of course. But Creel was shot—"

"By Robinson, while he was making his get-away. He was at the edge of the piazza. Didn't it occur to you as strange, if they had a fight in the room and Creel was hit in the arm, that there wasn't any sign of it in the library or on the piazza—that there weren't any bloodstains?"

"Sure—of course," said the Chief, who plainly had never thought of it before. "But I figured mebbe that could be explained somehow."

"And Langevin's story that Creel was already out of the house and going fast toward his boat is proved by the location of the wound—in the back of his arm."

THE Chief was adjusting, with difficulty, some of his mental processes.

"I want to telephone Boston headquarters the minute I get in," he decided anxiously. "I don't want it given out to the papers that these fellers are pinched for the murder—not until I've had a chance to look into what you say," he amended.

"It won't be given out; I've fixed that," Ford assured him.

The Chief, who had an uncomfortable picture of Henry Bunster being laughed at, was grateful.

"It's a good, quick clean-up of a bad gang of yeggs, anyway," he consoled himself. "Tell me about it. How did you happen to be in it? Last I saw of you, you was on a vacation and due to stay on it until after Sunday."

"I'm digging into the murder case. Joe Greene talked me into it. He thought I might be able to help—"

"Help whom?" The Chief's voice was suspicious. "Tommy Hawbaker?"

"You," Ford astonished him by replying. "Me. But I—"

"Wait a minute. I know you said last night you didn't want any help, or need any; but you do now, don't you?"

There was stubbornness in the reply:

"I don't see's I do. I been handlin' the police business of Rockpoint without any help for a good many years—"

"It was my idea that if I was lucky enough to dig up something, you and I could work more or less together. As far

as any expense goes, if there is any, Greene offered to take care of it. It might turn out—the chances are at least even it would—that if there is an arrest, you could make it. As far as I'm concerned, I'm not trying to get any especial personal credit." Ford lowered his voice to a confidential tone. "You see, I'm in a sort of peculiar position. Hawbaker asked me to help out, and I declined. Then he got Story. Story hasn't asked me to work with them—and if he did, I'd as soon work with you. However, if you'd rather I went to Hawbaker—"

Chief Bunster, bearing in mind that Ford had in some manner learned how many crooks were in the motorboat and secured a confession, and that he might have gained already from that confession a clue that would lead to the unraveling of the greater crime, had no desire to see him lined up with the positive, sarcastic and politically offensive Mr. Hawbaker.

"Who killed Robinson?" he asked. "If these yeggs in the boat didn't, who did?"

"I don't know. But I think I've got it narrowed down to three people."

"Three? Who are they?"

"When I'm working on a case, I never discuss mere suspicions." Ford's smile took the edge off his refusal. "It isn't fair to the ones that are going to turn out to be innocent. When I find out which of the three did it, if I'm lucky enough to, I'll tell you—or Hawbaker."

"Me," the Chief decided. The train began to slow down for Rockpoint. "I suppose I ought to tell the reporters."

"Not unless you want to. If anything comes up where I have to use any authority, I'll say I'm on the case at your request. Otherwise, it may turn out that I don't appear in it at all—if you should get the murderer without my help, for example."

Bunster clearly considered this an agreeable way to leave the matter.

"We ought to have consultations, or something," he suggested vaguely.

"I'll get in touch with you. In the meantime, if I were you, I should say to the reporters there isn't anything to give out."

"But these fellers that were in the boat?"

"When they have the three, there'll have to be publicity, to be sure. But you just say they are arrested for the motorboat robberies, and that whether they had anything to do with Robinson's murder or not

remains to be seen. Look wise and don't commit yourself."

AS looking wise was one of the best things Henry Bunster did, and not committing himself was a lesson he had long since learned in politics, he approved of this as excellent advice and nodded sagely. The train stopped.

There were reporters on the platform who surrounded the Chief. Ford alighted, unobserved, from the other end of the car. As he looked about him for a public motor, a voice quietly spoke his name, and he turned to find John, the Greene chauffeur, at his elbow.

"Mr. Greene thought you might be on this train, sir," he said. "He would like to see you at once. The car is right here."

Ford entered it. He sat, fifteen minutes later, in a corner of the Greene veranda where no one could overhear them, and Greene went at his subject without preamble.

"You asked me, the last thing this morning, if Roger Cresson was here after the murder," he said. "I have found out where he was. You were a good guesser—at least, I suppose you were; you didn't say why you asked the question. He has some evidence—important evidence, although he doesn't think so."

Ford waited.

"He came to see Hope this afternoon. She told Mrs. Greene about it after he was gone. He was pretty badly worked up, I guess. He hadn't wanted to mention it at all. It seems he went over to Robinson's house to tell old Wade something he had forgotten at the office, and just as he was going in, he heard Jake Crandall quoting Scripture. Some significant Scripture, I'd say—although Roger doesn't think so. I can't quote it exactly, but it was something like, 'Thou fool, thy soul shall be demanded of thee this night.'"

"'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee,'" supplied Ford.

"That's it. I didn't know you were up on the Bible."

"Some evening, when you think you'd like to learn more about business and politics than you ever dreamed of, read the Proverbs," Ford advised. "What happened after Crandall said that?"

"Roger doesn't know. He supposed it was just one of the old man's sermons, and as what he wanted to see Robinson for wasn't especially important and he had no

desire to hear old Jake preach, he went away."

"But he didn't come back here, you say?"

"He thought maybe he would see Robinson later, when Crandall had gone, so he took a walk. Before he got back, he heard about the murder. A couple of automobile parties were shouting to each other about it over on the Neck Road, nearly to town. He went right home."

"Why?"

"He knew his evidence would get old Jake into trouble, and he didn't believe—and doesn't—that Jake killed him. So he decided not to tell what he heard."

"But he has."

"Tommy Hawbaker and Fred Story found out, somehow, that he was seen going from here over to Robinson's house, and they got him down in Hawbaker's office and third-degreed him. So of course there was nothing to do but tell the truth. Once he had told them, he naturally didn't have any reason to make a secret of it with others."

FORD digested this information while Greene lighted a fresh cigar.

"Looks like the old man got a command from the Lord, and carried it out, doesn't it?"

"It is strong evidence," Ford replied. "Is there any change in his condition?"

"He is better tonight—opened his eyes and seemed to know the doctor. I wonder if they will arrest him right away."

"It is hardly necessary. Even if he lives, it will be some time before he can be moved."

"Mrs. Bling—the housekeeper, you know—fired the nurse."

"Why?"

"She said she thought from old Jake's looks that he didn't like her. If you ask me, I think it was Yankee pride. Wouldn't be beholden to anybody. Seemed to her like charity."

"We know lots of 'em that way," Ford agreed. After a moment's silence, during which he arranged and rearranged various facts and fancies in his mind, he asked: "Do you know whether anybody found out what was in that lignum-vitæ box?"

"No. They were hunting for the key and sent to ask Hope about it. She had seen the box, but she didn't know anything about the key." He put a finger and thumb into a waistcoat pocket, and with-

drew them. "This is probably it. She found it late this afternoon."

Ford took the key to where a band of light came through a window.

"This is it," he decided positively.

"There aren't any keys of that workmanship made in this country. Where was it? How did she come to give it to you?"

"She came across it accidentally. All of a sudden, this afternoon, she thought of a little jewel-case of her father's that he always kept on his dresser. Nothing of great value in it, you know—just a watch-chain or two, and cuff-links, and comparatively inexpensive stickpins, and that sort of truck. She was afraid some servant might be tempted, so she went over to get it. The key was in it. She gave it to me to hand to Hawbaker, or the executors, or whoever ought to have it."

"Has she told anybody else she found it?"

"I don't think so. I don't believe she has seen anybody outside our family since she went over there."

"Would you mind letting me take charge of it—temporarily—and asking her not to mention for a day or so that she found it, unless she is asked direct? I'll be responsible for it, of course, and either turn it over to the executors in your name or give it back to you."

"I don't see any objection. Put it in your pocket. See here, Raleigh! If old Jake Crandall killed Robinson, it was the act of a lunatic, wasn't it? A mission from Heaven, and all that sort of thing? How could that box have any bearing on that?"

"I may be as far from the truth as it is getting past any Christian bedtime," Ford said, rising to go, "but in my opinion, if Jake Crandall killed Wade Robinson, there is something in that box that Crandall wanted. I am figuring on taking a look—and the way to get it isn't to hand the key to the executors and let them thank me kindly and go off and open it all by their lones. But if you want to know how I am going to work it to be present when the box is opened, it won't do any good to ask, because at this minute I haven't the slightest idea."

HE still had not adopted any definite plan to accomplish this desire when Dick Bailey drove hastily up to Whalen Lawrence's house just after luncheon was over on the following day. Ford went out

over on the following day. Ford went out to meet him; the visit could only mean some new development, because they had parted not two hours before. On the streets in Boston, at this minute, the early editions of the afternoon newspapers were carrying long stories of the capture of Creel, Murray and Langevin, and all of them except the *News* were playing up the trio of motorboat pirates as murder-suspects. Bailey's newspaper alone, thanks to Ford's confidential and not-yet-to-be-made-public information, called them yeggs and nothing worse, and argued against the probability of their being concerned in Wade Robinson's death.

Bailey looked at his watch and spoke rapidly:

"The office just telephoned me that Edgewaite, of the Interstate Trust, with Hawbaker and Story, have got authority from the probate judge to force that box that was found under Robinson's head. It seems the Interstate Trust has the will, which names them as executors, and according to the usual custom, they don't want to offer it for probate until after he is buried. But Hawbaker and Story want to know what is in the box, and so they asked the court not to wait. He told them to go ahead and bust it, and they're on their way here to do it now—the train is due in twenty-six minutes."

"Was it a formal hearing? Does everybody know it?"

"No. They went before the judge in chambers. Our people aren't sure, but apparently the order isn't officially made at all; they have simply been assured by the court that they can go ahead. With no will yet offered and no petition filed for the appointment of executors, there isn't anything before the judge to give him jurisdiction. But the executors would have a right to force the box as soon as the court makes the appointment, anyway, so, as long as they were the ones who asked permission, there wasn't any reason why it shouldn't be granted, or at least officially winked at. There isn't any formal record of the proceeding, so far as we can find out. We can't print it. We got it through a leak."

"Was Bunster with them?"

"No. He has been here in town all the morning."

"Oh, Whalen! I've got to go to town. See you after a while."

Mr. Lawrence, from a window, waved

acknowledgment of the shouted information, and Ford turned toward the little livery car.

"Have the man drive us to the police-station," he said. "If Bunster isn't there, we must find him." He grinned with satisfaction. "I tied up to the old man last night on a hunch that something might happen where I would have to have the strong support of the local constituted authorities, and here's where I need it. I want to see that box opened, and I'm not sure I would if I merely showed up with a Boston police badge, representing nobody in particular, and said I wanted to declare myself in."

"At Fred Story's party?" scoffed Bailey. "You'd have a proud chance!"

CHAPTER XII

EDGEWAITE, of the Interstate Trust Company, a precise little man whose photograph at any moment of public appearance could have served as a tailor's advertisement, took a chair at the head of the table in the middle of Hawbaker's office. Story dropped into a place at his right. Hawbaker, with a little bustle of importance, brought the lignum-vitæ box from the safe against the office wall. A serious-faced mechanic, who had set on the table a heavy, jangling handbag, inspected the little chest with a professional eye, got a big bunch of keys out of the bag, and proceeded to try them in the lock. After three minutes he shook his head.

"Nothing doing," he remarked. "We'll have to break it. It isn't going to be easy. Whoever made that box figured that if anybody ever broke into it, he'd have his work cut out."

He began to dig up sundry tools. The door opened, and Chief Bunster stood in it, Raleigh Ford's face showing above his shoulder. Behind them was the medical examiner.

"I heard you were going to open that yellow box," the Chief said, "so I thought, long's there isn't anybody any more interested than I am in this Robinson case, that I'd drop in. I brought Doctor Silk along. It might save him getting the information secondhand at the inquest."

Hawbaker did not make any attempt to look pleased. "I intended to lock that door," he said significantly.

The Chief grinned. "But you'd have opened it for me, wouldn't you, Tommy? For me or Doctor Silk, one or the other? You wasn't figuring that anything about how Robinson come to be killed wouldn't be our business just as much as it would be yours, was you?"

"Why—no. But—"

"But nothin'," declared the Chief. "You want to know what's in that box. That's all right an' proper an' accordin' to Hoyle. So do we."

STORY spoke a word or two out of the corner of his mouth to the district attorney. "Oh, all right," Hawbaker said, shortly. "As officials, whatever you see or hear will be regarded as confidential, of course. Where do you come in, Mr. Ford?"

"With the Chief," Ford smiled. "It was very complimentary of you to ask me to take charge of this investigation, night before last,"—he enjoyed the expression on Story's face at the news,—"but as I told you, my furlough was very short. Later, however, Colonel Calder extended it. In the meantime, when it looked as though I couldn't take hold,"—for the life of him he couldn't resist this wording, for the additional jolt it gave the State detective,—"you got Story. So when Chief Bunster—" He spread his hands slightly, as though to say "and there you are," and left the sentence unfinished. If Story and Hawbaker thought Bunster had come to him for help instead of his forcing himself upon Bunster, they had that privilege. He looked across the table and said amiably: "Hello, Edgewaite."

"Hello, Ford," Edgewaite replied with as much cordiality as he ever displayed, which, to be altogether truthful, was not a vast quantity. Hawbaker and Story, who knew that the banker was not in the habit of hailing many men with less ceremonious salutations than "Good afternoon," appreciated the fact that Edgewaite and Ford must know one another socially.

"You're in charge of this meeting, aren't you?" Ford asked.

"I am," Hawbaker put in quickly.

"I beg your pardon," Ford's voice was altogether innocent. "My information was that the court's authority to open the box was given to the Interstate Trust—as future executors."

"That's true. It was," the district attorney admitted. "I mean to say that so

far as seeking for evidence that might affect the case—"

"Naturally," agreed Ford. "What I was driving at, by my inquiry, was the proper person to take charge of this key. If I am not mistaken, it will save our friend with the tools a lot of trouble."

He dropped it on the table in front of Edgewaite.

"Miss Robinson found it last evening in a jewel-case in her father's bedroom," he explained. "She handed it to Joe Greene, and he gave it to me to pass along to the proper person. I take it that means you."

"Let's have the box," Story ordered the mechanic.

"I'll take it, please," Edgewaite amended. "Thank you."

HE slipped the key into the lock. It turned easily. With the fingers of his left hand he raised the cover the slightest fraction of an inch, sufficient to prove that the chest was open without displaying any of its contents.

"It is the key," he said. "You've saved us a lot of trouble, Ford. Thank you for coming, Mr. Grunley. You will send your bill, of course, to our office."

"And forget you ever saw a box," supplemented Story.

"That's understood," the locksmith agreed unemotionally, and threw his keys and tools back into his bag. Not until he had gone, did Edgewaite lift the cover beneath his hand.

Six men leaned forward as he threw back the lid. Six pairs of eyes focused themselves on what was beneath it. In the shallow box lay one folded paper and nothing else. The side toward them was blank. Edgewaite unfolded it, adjusted his nose-glasses and displayed a half-sheet of paper, letter size, covered with handwriting.

"Mr. Robinson's hand," he said. He dropped his eyes to the bottom of the sheet. "And signed by his initials. But it doesn't appear to whom it was written. The upper half of the sheet is missing."

Story stretched out a hand. "Is it a letter?" he asked. Edgewaite ignored both the question and the gestured invitation to let some one else take the center of the stage. He perused the document in silence, while the others, perforce, awaited his pleasure. "It is," he finally said. "And its contents might easily have some bearing on the question of who murdered Mr. Robinson. That is, they might if it should

prove possible to determine to whom he refers when he uses merely the initial 'C.' If men only realized," he fretted, "how important it often is for names to be written out so that there can be no question—"

"Read it!" almost shouted Chief Bunster.

MR. EDGEWAITE frowned at the interruption and readjusted his glasses. Then, with exasperating moderation, he again fixed his eyes on the sheet.

"It is the lower half of a letter, torn across at the fold," he said. "The date, the address, and the letterhead—if it was written on a letterhead—are missing. It begins in the middle of a sentence—that is, it appears to. Yes, the first letter is not a capital; it looks a little like one, but here is the dot near the top of the *t*. Mr. Robinson often dotted his *i*'s far to the right; in his bank signature, with which of course I am quite familiar, the dot frequently appears over the *n*. I refer to the first *n* of course. . . . Yes, this begins in the middle of a sentence."

Chief Bunster was breathing noisily through his nose and giving other indications that about one more slow phrase of description would be his limit prior to a violent and profane explosion, but Edgewaite, serenely unconscious of any atmosphere of impatience, had finished his exposition of chirography-forms and began to read aloud:

" . . . item in the papers about my receiving threats was true, but threats don't worry me. I have lived for nearly forty-six years, and during the past twenty a good many men have told me what they were going to do to me, but none of them have done it. Of course C hates me enough to kill me tomorrow if he had the nerve, but he hasn't and never will have. He would be lighting a powder-mine under himself and he knows it. Meantime I have no fear of anybody that threatens. Barking dogs seldom bite.

"Yrs. Truly—W. R."

At last Edgewaite relinquished the paper, and the others inspected it. Tommy Hawbaker made the first comment:

"He was sixty-one. Forty-six from sixty-one leaves fifteen."

"Nearly forty-six," amended Doctor Silk, looking up from the sheet. "Forty-five from sixty-one. Sixteen years."

The knob turned. "Oh, thunder! I forgot to lock that door again," Haw-

baker muttered. "Friday" Cresson stood in the doorway and surveyed the company. He was short of breath, and little hectic spots showed over his cheek-bones.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "but I just had word from our office that you were going to open that little strong-box of Mr. Robinson's, and I felt some representative ought to be present. I—" He dropped into a chair that stood beside the door. "Let me get my breath," he panted. "I hurried up the steps. It is very foolish for me to hurry. I haven't been feeling my best since night before last."

Edgewaite's face showed unfeigned regret.

"We should have notified you if we had thought you would especially like to know," he apologized. "Mr. Hawbaker and Mr. Story, here, came to us with the suggestion, and it seemed to us that your office would be quite adequately represented by us, seeing that we are Mr. Robinson's executors. If I had had the slightest idea you would care to be present—"

"That's all right, Edgewaite," Cresson interrupted. The color in his face was fading, and his respiration was becoming normal. "I have represented Mr. Robinson on a good many occasions and at a good many places for a good many years. If there is anything in that box—"

"There is," Edgewaite broke in, "and it seems to be of considerable importance."

Cresson came to his feet and approached the table. For the first time, evidently, he saw the box, its lid thrown back. "You have succeeded in forcing it already!" he exclaimed.

"Miss Robinson found the key," the banker said. "See here. Read this letter and tell us what you make of it."

There was a vacant chair at the end of the table opposite Edgewaite, and Cresson sat in it and took the paper. His hand trembled so that the sheet rattled. He laid the paper on the table, extended the hand before him, and observed the vibration of the fingers. "Look at that!" he cried disgustedly. "That's what running up a flight of steps, and being sixty-one years old, will do to a man who used to think he didn't have any nerves at all. You can't beat old Father Time, can you, Doctor?"

The medical examiner had not taken his eyes off Cresson's face since he entered the room. "You can avoid undue excite-

ment," he now smiled professionally. "You can let younger men bear the brunt of"—he motioned toward the box—"harrowing things like this."

"You're mighty near sixty yourself," Cresson retorted, and picked up the half-sheet of paper. "What else besides this was in the box?"

"Nothing whatever," Edgewaite replied. "Except for that, it was empty." He tipped the chest so that Cresson could see this for himself.

No one spoke while Robinson's "Man Friday" read the letter. He read it rapidly, and then again slowly. He turned it over and surveyed the blankness of its other side. He went back and let his eyes rest on its significant sentence.

AT length he looked up and around at the others and spoke slowly, thoughtfully:

"I wonder why he kept it. I supposed he threw it away—years ago."

"Do you mean you have seen that letter before?" demanded Story.

"It was written to me," Cresson said.

He went on to explain:

"I was out of town—this letter came to me, as I recall it, in Chicago. There had been a story in the newspapers about his receiving threatening letters. Anarchist stuff, perhaps—I don't know. I asked him about it, and this was the reply. I suppose the beginning of the letter—the part that is missing—had some business advice or other on it; I don't remember. It must have had, because I kept it. It was long after that I came across it, cleaning out a private drawer in my desk. Whatever the business was that the first part referred to, it was out of date by then; there was no further need to keep the letter. I remember starting to tear it up, tearing it once across, and then thinking I would show it to him. I went into his room and dropped it on the desk in front of him, and said something to the effect that nothing had happened to him yet. He picked it up and read it, and grinned, and said it took more than threats to kill him, or something like that. I supposed he would destroy it. For some reason or other he kept it—all this time! Why, it must be ten or a dozen years at least since I gave it back to him. Yes, I think it must be at least a dozen."

"Who was 'C'?" Story queried.

The old man seemed sunk in thought.

"You know, don't you?" the State detective asked more sharply.

"Yes," was the answer, "I know. And I'm sorry to have to tell you, because it can't lead to but one thing, and I never believed he would harm Robinson. It's hard for me to believe it now. That 'C' stands for *Crandall*."

"That settles it," cried Hawbaker to Story. "I told you yesterday afternoon it was a sure thing."

"Why did Crandall hate him?" Story asked, ignoring the district attorney's exclamation.

"He never told me. I remember, now, that one of the things I had in mind when I took that old letter in and laid it down in front of him was that perhaps it would make him unbosom himself. I was curious. It was some quarrel that must have dated back a great many years. But he never told me." A glint that might have passed for humor came into Cresson's eyes. "Some of you may be familiar with the fact," he said dryly, "that Robinson did not take many people into his confidence. He did not take anybody into his full confidence."

"Excuse me, Mr. Cresson," Ford said, "but what does this mean: 'He would be lighting a powder-mine under himself, and he knows it.'"

"I don't know."

"You never asked?"

AGAIN the faint suspicion of a smile in Cresson's eyes. "I never asked. I have been associated with Mr. Robinson for a great many years. Very early in that association, I may have asked him something that was not any of my business. I certainly haven't for twenty years or more."

"This document ought to be put back in the box and locked," Hawbaker said. "You can let me have the key, I suppose, Mr. Edgewaite."

"I should have to consult with our directors," the banker replied. "As it is in our hands as executors—"

"Make a copy of it, put it back in the box, and let him keep the key. It will be forthcoming whenever we need the original for evidence," Story advised the district attorney. Hawbaker started toward the door. "Wait a minute. Were you going to have a stenographer copy it? I wouldn't. Make a pen copy of it yourself. There are enough who know what is in it, already."

"Is there any other way in which I can be of assistance?" Cresson asked. "If not, perhaps there is no need for me to stay."

"Not unless you can tell us more about this letter and its meaning."

"I have told you all I know. If anything further should come to me, of course I'll advise you—but I'm quite sure I have remembered it all." He sighed. "Accused by a dead hand," he said, "by a hand that is pointing at him from sixteen years ago! It's tough on the poor old lunatic. I think it is just as well all around that he will probably never know it. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

"How about that, Doctor?" Story asked, the moment the door was closed. "Isn't there any chance that Crandall will ever know it? Is he going to cash in?"

"Not immediately, at any rate," Doctor Silk said. "As a matter of fact, his condition today shows a surprising improvement. The man must have started out in life with an iron constitution."

"How much improvement?"

"He is able to move one hand, and his mind seems clearer. Of course you understand that a clear mind, referring to Crandall, is a more or less relative phrase."

"Will it injure him to be talked to?"

"What's the use of that?" Hawbaker put in. "Why not wait and place him under arrest after he is better? He can't get away."

"He can die without telling what he knows. Don't forget that matter we were discussing last evening."

"I have maintained for more than twenty-four hours that it is a dead-open-and-shut that Crandall did it," Hawbaker explained to Ford, "but Story has a theory—"

The State detective's voice cut in forcefully. "Please, Mr. Hawbaker! What theories I might or might not have are of no interest to the general public—until they are proven. Let's not advertise them."

HAWBAKER reddened, abashed and angry at the reproof. "I shouldn't consider 'advertised' the word," he retorted. "However—I don't see, now that we know, why we need go near Crandall at all."

"Because I want to find out what he's got to say about it," Story insisted stubbornly. "It does look as if he did it, and if we get at him now and he confesses it,

the case will be all cleaned up. And he will confess if he is the man, or he is the first murderer with religious mania I ever knew who wouldn't."

"How about that?" Chief Bunster asked Ford.

"They usually confess," Ford agreed.

"But it might kill him," protested Doctor Silk.

"And he might have another cerebral hemorrhage and die at any minute, lying right there in his bed with no excitement whatever," said Story. "That's true, isn't it?"

The Doctor admitted it was.

"Then he ought to be asked to tell what he knows, so far as he can—and will."

Doctor Silk considered, brows wrinkled. "He has a good constitution," he said, "but it might easily prove a very serious and dangerous thing to do. Having a lot of people, some of them strangers—"

"It wouldn't be so likely to have a bad effect if only one of us went with you, would it?" Story made the suggestion suavely. Before Silk could reply, Hawbaker snapped, bristling:

"The district attorney will be present when he is questioned."

"And the Chief of Police," Bunster supplemented, with great positiveness.

"Now, really, Chief—" began Hawbaker, but Doctor Silk reached out an experienced and dexterous hand and seized the line of least resistance.

"I don't know that five would disturb him any more seriously than two," he said hastily. "But no more excitement than is necessary—no violent questions! And if I find it is affecting him dangerously, you must stop and go away."

CHAPTER XIII

JACOB CRANDALL lay in his room on the second floor of the solid old house that a shipmaster had built in the days before summer visitors came to Rockpoint Neck, a house now unpainted and unrepaired, an eyesore to the rich whose estates surrounded it. In the middle of his great bed he looked pitifully frail and shrunken. Up over his left arm and shoulder stretched the clean white bed-covering. His right arm lay outside the counterpane, which rose and fell above his chest with the intake and outgo of his breath. His facial muscles sagged lax,

expressionless. Only his eyes seemed to have actual life. They moved from face to face of the men who had come quietly in at Doctor Silk's call and were standing by the foot of the bed.

It was a neat room, but bare. Windows, open to the summer breeze, looked out upon a marvelous panorama of sea and sky. There were trails of smudgy smoke and dots of canvas against the blue, and a distant sharp contrast of grayish brown where Church Steeple Rock thrust itself up like some vast, beautiful monument in a vague, undefined and mysterious graveyard, as indeed it had been before the days of warning lights along the coast, as indeed it still occasionally was, in times of fog and snow, for the skipper who meant to give it wide leeway but had lost his reckoning.

There was no furniture beyond the merest necessities, and no touch of ornament. A prim walnut stand by the head of the bed held a squat kerosene lamp and one book, a Bible whose Oxford binding was worn to a rusty brown. There were spectacles on the book, where the housekeeper had laid it and them down when the Doctor and his companions came.

MARY ABBIE BLING, stern-faced, tight-lipped and thin, patted a wrinkle in the bed-cover with a hand knotted and gnarled by long toil, and effaced herself behind Doctor Silk. For all the unclouded serenity of the sky, a sea was making up from the southeast; the occasional sharp rumble of a breaking surge came through the windows from a near-by ledge. But for that and a little rustle of wind at the curtains the room was very still.

"These are the gentlemen I just told you about," Doctor Silk said. "They want to ask you a question or two. You can answer them, of course, as you answered me when I was here a few hours ago—by moving your hand. Once for 'Yes' and twice for 'No.' Do you understand?"

The right hand on the coverlet moved once. The roving eyes searched their faces.

Doctor Silk turned to the others, and lowered his voice. "I don't know whether he even has heard Robinson is dead," he said. "Has he been told?" he asked Mrs. Bling.

"I aint told him nothin'," the woman said. "He aint seemed to want me to. All he's shown any int'rest in is havin'

some chapters read. I just been settin' here readin' to him quite a spell."

"I would suggest," Raleigh Ford said, "that before any questions are asked him about what happened the other night, you establish in some way—as a physician you will know how to do it much better than we would—just what understanding he has of things in general. Just how clear his mind is. Unless we know how rationally he can think, whatever he might tell us about what he saw there wouldn't have much value."

"True," agreed the Doctor. He turned to the bed.

"Mr. Crandall," he said, "you're getting along fine—fine! There's still a little trouble with your circulation, of course, but you're a lot better today than you were yesterday. We'll have you talking and getting up out of bed, the first thing you know. Of course, just now it is hard to answer questions. It isn't easy to answer everything by 'Yes' or 'No.' I'm going to ask you first just one or two things about yourself that we all know—just to try the hand. You are more than sixty years old, aren't you?"

The hand moved once.

"Over seventy?"

Two motions.

"Are you just sixty-five?"

No.

"Sixty-six?"

Yes.

DOCTOR SILK turned inquiringly to the housekeeper. "Be sixty-seven come the tenth of next December," she said.

The Doctor thought a moment and laid his hand on Bunster's shoulder.

"Do you know this man?"

The hand replied in the affirmative.

"Have you known him a long time?"

Yes.

"His name is Mr. Henry, isn't it?"

Promptly the fingers tapped the counterpane once, paused, tapped it twice.

"'Yes' and 'No,'" translated the Doctor.

"Do you mean that his name is Henry, but that that isn't all of it?"

Yes.

"Is his last name Bunster?"

One tap.

"Is that sufficient?" the Doctor asked the others.

"I should say so," Story agreed. "May I ask him a question, now?"

He addressed Crandall pleasantly, soothingly:

"You have been a little under the weather, you know, Mr. Crandall. You were taken sick out in your yard. Do you remember the things that happened just before that?"

The darting eyes showed excitement. The hand moved once.

"Did you know that your neighbor, Mr. Robinson, was also taken sick that night?"

The reply was quick, impatient. It was the triple sign, yes and no.

"You know, then, that it was not sickness?"

Yes.

"You know that he has passed away?"

Yes.

"Were you in his library when it happened?"

The answer was again hurried. It was in the negative.

"But your voice was heard there!" Hawbaker burst in. "Your voice was heard in the library."

The hand beat against the cover three times, four, five.

"He can't answer that with yes or no," Ford said.

"Well, how can I ask it any different than Story did—and he said no. I want him to understand that we know he was there. I don't want to upset you, Mr. Crandall, but we want the truth."

CRANDALL'S eyes were staring. He struggled mightily to speak, gurgling in his throat. His eyes leaped from face to face, found that of Mrs. Bling, and rested there. From the wrist his right hand twisted toward the side of the bed, clumsily trying to point.

"He makes a sign like that when he wants me to read a chapter," the housekeeper said.

"Don't ask any more questions at present; if that is what he wants, let him have his way," Doctor Silk commanded with authority. "It may calm him. Do you want a chapter of the Bible read to you? Is that what you are trying to tell us?"

Yes and no, came the quick answer.

"I think I get his meaning," Ford said

to the others. "Is there something in particular in the Bible—some particular chapter or verse—that you want us to read?"

A single tap replied.

"And you know which chapter it is?"

Yes.

"And which verse?"

This time there was hesitation. The old man closed his eyes. When, after a moment, they opened, they held a look of relief. He gave the affirmative signal.

"He had to stop and think, but he remembered it," Bunster exclaimed. "It beats all how he can quote it, chapter and verse."

Ford took the worn volume from the table.

"We'll find it," he assured the old man confidently. "Is it in the Old Testament or the New? Wait a minute. Excuse me. Is it in the Old Testament?"

The response was eager—yes.

Ford opened the index. "I'll read the names of the books over slowly," he said. "There isn't any need for you to move your hand every time. When I come to the right one you can say yes. . . . Genesis?"

The hand lifted and fell.

"It is in Genesis. I will call the numbers of the chapters. One, two, three—" He went on, giving time between each number for the sign. "Twenty-six, twenty-seven—"

Crandall's excitement had been increasing. Doctor Silk looked down into his flushed face with concern.

The hand tapped.

"In Chapter Twenty-seven," Ford said. "Now I'll call the numbers of the verses. First, second—" The signal came at twenty-two.

"You want me to read the twenty-second verse of the twenty-seventh chapter of Genesis." Ford turned the leaves of the book.

"Hurry, please," urged the Doctor in a whisper. "That effort of memory was too much of a strain, I'm afraid. I don't like his looks at all."

Ford read:

"The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

The conclusion of this absorbing mystery story will appear in the next, the May, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



Goats That Run

A delightful romance wherein the sport of kings has an important place. You will remember Mr. Brooks for "Cutting Back," "Double Double Cross" and other attractive stories.

By JONATHAN BROOKS

ROMANCE also is not always to the swift. The broker who cleans up without the flicker of an eyelid or the quickening of a heartbeat when Bethlehem makes one of its periodic climbs may have a secretary who gets a hysterical thrill when Stutz advances far enough to net him four hundred and eighty dollars. The editor who lambasts gambling in all its forms except his own particular choice and forces city officials to clamp on what is unpopularly known as the lid, probably has an office-boy who loses a year's growth before the six dollars he has invested in a race at Churchill Downs finally wins ninety-six dollars for him.

Romance, like the race, is not always to the swift. Even the snail, sprinting its own gait down the sidewalk after a rain, must get a thrill somehow. And the tortoise certainly got as much excitement out of the now historic race with the hare, as any thoroughbred from old Longfellow down to Roamer ever extracted from a hard-fought battle on the turf.

All this is by way of preface to a dem-

onstration of the fact that, while racing is the sport of kings by blood and bank-rating, a lot of us can get just as much pleasure and profit in proportion out of it, as any of our lords and former masters. Take the case of Francisco Goe, market and financial editor of the *Press*, in Indianapolis, where there hasn't been a running-race since the days of Pink Coat and Lieutenant Gibson.

"Frank," said John Anderson, foreman of the composing-room, one afternoon last winter when Francisco was making up his financial page, "look at this. A horse named Francisco is entered in the fourth race at New Orleans today!"

"That's funny, isn't it?" Francisco commented, looking up from his work. "Same name as mine, by George. It's a queer coincidence."

"Coincidence, my granny!" said Anderson. "It's a hunch. Y'oughta get something down on that ol' goat."

"Get something down on him?" queried Francisco.

"Sure, bet on him to win the race. He's at thirty to one. Put ten dollars on him,

and if he wins, you get three hundred dollars."

"But if he don't win?" asked Francisco.

JOHN ANDERSON'S eyes popped open in utter disbelief that such ignorance could exist. It was inconceivable to a man who had started his inky career setting form sheets by hand for the old *Courier-Journal* down in Louisville.

"It's this way," he explained, painstakingly suppressing a surge of withering scorn. "You bet ten dollars. If Francisco wins, you get three hundred dollars, if he's second, you win one hundred and seventy-five dollars, and if he's third you drag down ninety dollars. Is that clear?"

"Yes; but what if he finishes after the third horse?"

"You don't win a nickel, nor get your ten back," he added as an afterthought. "But it's a hunch. If a horse named John Anderson started at New Orleans or Pimlico or Aqueduct or anywhere else, and I knew it, I'd mortgage my house to bet on him. It's a hunch, I tell you."

"But you just said this was a goat."

"Oh, Lord," said John Anderson in disgust. "A lot of these horses are nothing but goats that run, or crippled old billies that try to run. But say," he demanded, "have you got ten dollars, or haven't you? If you have, give it to me. I'm not gonna let you overlook that hunch. It's a mortal cinch. Give me the ten."

Whether Francisco Goe fell under a hypnotic spell or merely dreaded the ridicule of the tyrannical foreman is not clear. But he gave the traditional Italian conservatism a hard backhanded wallop, produced a ten-dollar bill, and passed it over to Anderson—who, disregarding the fact that it was within twenty-five minutes of closing time for the last edition, went down on the elevator and out of the building, crossed the alley and went upstairs to a back room, Francisco finished supervision of the market-page make-up, went downstairs to the news-room for his hat and coat, and started out of the office. He bumped into John Anderson, returning.

"Here's your ticket," said Anderson, "but I'll keep it for you. I put ten on him myself along with your ten. That's how I feel about Francisco. I'll let you know how we come out. But say, don't you know anything about horses?"

"Never saw a horse-race in my life, nor bet on one, either," Francisco replied.

"Good Lord," exclaimed John Anderson, shaking his head in pity. The market editor went on his way to the Board of Trade Building, and Anderson headed back to the composing-room.

"That little market editor," he confided to the copy-cutter, another patron of the book across the alley, "never saw a horse-race. I just got him to put ten on a horse named Francisco in the fourth at New Orleans, but he don't know what it's all about. Can you beat that?"

"It's a double-barreled cinch," said the copy-cutter. "His first bet, and the name hunch—why, he can't lose. Say, John, hold these scissors for me. I'm goin' down and climb aboard with ten myself."

NOW, a great many people in this world that couldn't lose have lost, despite that very impossibility. But Francisco not only couldn't lose, but did not. If Francisco the horse was a goat that ran, the other horses in the fourth at New Orleans must have been cows ridden by old women, for Francisco the horse won pulled up and looking back. John Anderson, jubilant, gave Francisco, dazed, some sound gambling advice the next day as he furtively slipped him the three hundred dollars and his original ten dollars, at Francisco's desk in the editorial rooms.

"Listen, kid; you hang on to that three hundred. Keep it some place where you can get at it in a hurry, and when this Francisco runs again, I'll tip you off. But say, don't let anybody around here know you're a winner this way. Some of these smart editors around here,"—and he looked over his shoulder to see if anybody heard him—"might put the police wise to this book and queer the whole thing."

Francisco promised to say nothing, but as Anderson left, he leaned back in his chair and tried to understand what it was all about. He was making forty dollars a week after a ten-year climb from a six-dollar wage as office-boy. Forty dollars counted for a good salary, and he was glad to work hard to draw it down. But this thing of taking in three hundred dollars, almost eight weeks' salary, for nothing more than the risk of a ten-dollar bill, was disconcerting, to say the least. It was therefore fifteen minutes before Francisco buckled back into his job, which at the moment consisted of sifting the news wheat from the chaff carried to his desk by the financial wires and the press-associations.

The shock wore off, and his head gradually cleared. He decided to accept Anderson's advice, keep quiet about his winning, and reinvest the three hundred in the book when Francisco started again. By noon, when he made his daily call at the Stock Exchange, he was in light and buoyant spirits. Esther Timpkins, niece and secretary of Thomas Timpkins, President of the Exchange, was there, her blonde head nodding and bobbing as her nimble fingers flew over her typewriter keyboard. She was glad to pause and talk with him. Moreover, when the emboldened Francisco, with visions of a new career in high finance in his head, asked her to go to the theater with him, she was willing to go. Esther had been acting as her uncle's secretary for three years, and in that time Francisco had grown from the position of the cat that looked at the queen, to her most devoted admirer. As soon as he had enough money, and was started in a business of his own—but then, that was Francisco's dream, and dreams are sacred.

And this is no love-story.

A RACE-HORSE, even the best of runners, cannot start every day. He must be right, and so must the track. For that matter, so must the race and the odds. It was almost three weeks before the owner of Francisco, the horse, decided the horse, the track, the race and the odds were all four of them right.

"Say, Frank," said John Anderson to Francisco, again in the composing-room, "they've thrown that horse into the fifth race at Hot Springs with a lot of other goats. He's at ten to one. He can win from these goats. That's why the odds are shorter. He's got a better chance. And he's sure to win. You put that three hundred right on his saddle and let it ride home with him. It means three thousand dollars. Whadya say?"

Francisco swallowed hard. He had not counted that three hundred dollars as his own. He knew all along that he wanted to chance winning again in order to make a really respectable amount, and felt rather like a trustee than the owner of the unexpected dollars. He hated, at the last moment, to part with it. With an effort, and in a dry-throated voice, he replied:

"Well, I guess I'm in the hands of my friends, John."

"That's the boy!" The foreman slapped him on the back heartily. "I'll just put

my little old three hundred dollars on him too, and we'll clean up. Can't lose. Have you got the money?"

"I'll have to get it from the bank across the street. Take me ten minutes."

Francisco the financial editor checked out six fifty-dollar bills and duly handed them over to Anderson to be placed on the saddle of Francisco, the horse, running in the fifth at Hot Springs. Then he went back to his desk, and broke into a cold sweat. He picked up a pencil and scribbled absently on a pile of copy-paper. Three hundred dollars would almost buy three hundred and fifty dollars in Liberty Bonds, paying four and three-quarters per cent. He could deposit those bonds with the others he had bought during the war, before he was drafted and sent to Camp Taylor. On the other hand, he knew a good utilities stock selling around seventy. He also knew a railroad bond-issue selling on the market in hundreds around seventy-five. That three hundred dollars would have bought four hundred dollars of these bonds, and they paid six per cent. Six per cent on four hundred dollars was twenty-four dollars, or eight per cent on the three hundred he would have invested. Why did he throw away that money on a fool horse-race? Three hundred dollars would make a good start toward furnishing a house for him and Esther. Or it would buy both the engagement- and the wedding-ring.

UNABLE to sit still, Francisco wiped his forehead and rubbed his eyes. He got a drink of ice-water and then strolled back to the sporting editor's desk. There he found the sport-page of a New Orleans paper several days old. Glancing through its columns he found the useless information that Francisco was a b. g., 4, by Little Frank, son of Big Frank, and his dam was Cohoes Girl. This meant no more to him than the form-writer's opinion that Francisco was a horse that might come on. Vaguely he hoped that Francisco would come on, whatever that meant. He stuffed the paper in his pocket, went back to his desk, took his hat and walked rapidly over to the Board of Trade. But the hard-working grain-brokers could not take his mind off his own speculation.

Therefore Francisco started back toward the Press building. He went up to the on the way. Sight of this building set him wondering what Esther would think of his

betting on the races, and after that, what would Uncle Tom Timkins, conservative old banker and head of the Exchange, say if he knew of it? Francisco shivered at the notion, and hurried in the direction of the Press building. He went up to the composing-room, ostensibly to get some proofs but really to see if John Anderson had any news. He found Anderson standing with the assistant sporting editor at the back of a telegrapher manning the late afternoon sport-wire. Anderson nodded to him, and motioned him to keep silence.

"Sh! They've had the fourth race in quite awhile, and we're waiting for the fifth to come in," he whispered.

Just as he finished the sentence, and before Francisco had got his bearings or obtained a strangle-hold on his composure, the telegraph instrument began clicking, and the operator started pounding his old blind typewriter. The operator muttered to himself, and lifted up the carriage of the machine for an instant. Francisco was too slow to follow him, but Anderson ducked his head, peered at the paper and then grasped Francisco's arm. He yelled:

"Fifth Hot Springs, Francisco, ten to one, first; Hot Potato, five to three and two to one, second.

"Kid, look here," whispered Anderson, restraining his own excitement after that one outburst. "We win! We drag down three thousand apiece. Oh, boy, can you beat it? Sh! Don't say a word."

FRANCISCO was in no danger of saying a word. His adam's apple was up between his teeth. His knees were suddenly starchless and limp; and dazed he looked about for a place to sit down. There was no such place in the busy composing-room. He grinned a foolish, sickly grin, wiped his face with a handkerchief and walked over to the water-bottle for a drink of ice-water. Anderson watched him curiously until a flash of understanding brought a smile.

"It's too much for the kid," he said to himself, "never bet but once before." Then, as Francisco came back to where he was standing, Anderson, patting him on the shoulder, added aloud:

"Well, son, it's a good thing I found that horse, and had the hunch, eh?"

"John, I'll say it was. I'd like to know how I can get even with you for that?"

"All square," Anderson assured him. "You did me a favor by playing the hunch. I couldn't have bet, if you hadn't."

"Wouldn't you have thought he'd win, unless I bet?" asked Francisco, surprised.

"Certainly wouldn't. I was ridin' in on your luck, kid, not on mine. But listen, let me tell you something: Don't you ever bet any money, to amount to anything, on a horse-race again. You quit right now, while you've got the game licked good and plenty."

"I'm through," declared Francisco, raising his right hand. "It's too hard a way to make money. Sweating sweat is all right, but sweating blood is too much."

So many people have remarked, and so many writers recorded, that human nature is a peculiar thing, that it is time somebody established the peculiarity of human nature as being both universal and natural. The most natural reaction for a man who has been a helpless lamb in a crisis is a sense of triumphant and dashing boldness. It is therefore no whit peculiar nor any reflection on young Francisco Goe's moral fiber that, a few hours after his three hundred had ridden home on a saddle bringing three thousand with it, he should have plucked up heart and begun to fancy himself as a successful and courageous business man. More than that, he unconsciously assumed a cocksure air in his thoughts of Esther Timpkins. At the same time that he began turning over in his mind the investment possibilities of his three thousand three hundred dollars, he was subconsciously establishing himself as irresistible with the girl. A wage-slave may look at a queen, but a rising young business man may without reproach from himself or outsiders seek her good graces.

Francisco was late leaving the office that evening, and the last thing he did before shutting down his old roll-top was to telephone Esther and ask her to go to a moving-picture play that night. She was glad to. After the theater they started to walk home out Meridian Street, but stopped to sit down on a bench in University Park, the month being April and the night pleasantly warm.

"Esther," he said after they had watched the procession of bright-eyed motors rolling north for some minutes, "why do you keep on working down there in that old Stock Exchange office?"

One thing led to another, and as was to be expected after that first question, Francisco was soon asking another and final question. It was not one of those long, intricate hypothetical queries that

backs and fills, misses fire on three-fourths of its cylinders and gets nowhere after a great fuss. Rather, it was a brave, simple question, answerable directly with yes or no. Or as in Esther's case, with a hesitant and then glad little nod of the head.

They sat quiet for a long time, dreaming their dream. Afterward, as they were strolling blissfully north along Meridian Street, Francisco poured out his story.

"I don't know what kind of a home I can make for you," he said, "but I know I can work hard to make it the best a girl ever had. Before I went to Camp Taylor I had bought two thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds, and I've some other savings besides. I've got two lots way out east on the National Road, beyond the college. And today—here's a surprise for you, girl: I made over three thousand dollars in a—ah—a deal. Do you suppose we can make a start?"

"We'll be millionaires," she declared. "My dad and poor old mother started with nothing but a mortgage and a team of horses, but they left me some things. And Uncle Tom will help us."

"That reminds me: I'll have to see him in the morning."

"Oh, don't you do it. I mean, let's find some way to work him around to our side first. If he will take our part—you see how it is, Frank," she explained. "Understand, I'm not caring if they should raise a fuss. Aunt Josephine don't like you, and she thinks I oughtn't encourage you. I didn't, did I, Frank? But they've been awfully nice to me ever since the folks died, and if we can make them—oh, you see how it is."

"Of course, of course, and don't you worry about it," he soothed her. "We'll find some way around it, all right. Maybe I'll get an inspiration."

NEXT morning Francisco talked with Uncle Tom, who, it so happened, had only a few minutes before been talking with Henry Thompson, a young mechanical engineer growing up in one of the big Indianapolis motor plants. Thompson had hardly fumbled out of the office, belaboring all conservative financiers under his breath and unaware that his idea had made a favorable impression, when Francisco Goe appeared.

"I seem to be haunted by bright young men this morning," remarked Uncle Tom. "Aren't you around rather early, Frank?"

"Guess I am," replied Francisco. "But I've got something I wanted to talk to you about."

"Think the office is the place for it?" Uncle Tom was no fool, as he had told his wife that morning. He had his suspicions about Frank Goe's interest in Esther.

"Why, yes, a matter of business," Frank explained, flushing slightly at the suggestion implied in the banker's question.

"Oh! Oh, I see. All right, what can I do for you, Frank?"

The youngster explained his financial situation, saying he had earned thirty-three hundred in a little transaction and wished to put it where it would do him the most good. He knew he could buy Liberties with it, but he thought Mr. Timpkins might know of some eight- or nine- or even ten-per-cent possibilities.

"Ever think of getting out of the newspaper game, Frank?" asked Uncle Tom after he had heard the whole story.

"Why, not definitely, no. But of course every newspaper man is looking for his chance. I'd like to get into business for myself, if I could to any advantage."

"Got any money besides that thirty-three hundred?"

"Two thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds, and three hundred in the bank."

"Hmm!" Uncle Tom pulled his mustache thoughtfully and looked Francisco over with a careful, appraising gaze. "Young man," he said deliberately, "I'd like to make you a proposition. Have you got time to listen? This morning, just before you came in, a young engineer named Thompson was here telling me about a scheme of his to form a company to make over old ball bearings and roller bearings. He has a process for retempering bearings, and he thinks that he can sell them after they have been reground and repolished. He would buy up old bearings from the high-grade motor-car makers here in town who are renewing old cars, make them over and sell them to accessories dealers and makers of small cars.

"Now, I like his idea for two reasons: I happen to be a director in one of the big, high-priced car-factories, and also in one of the small car-companies. I know enough about the business to know the idea is feasible. That's one thing. The other is, that when you can buy at junk prices and sell close up to the new-goods market, you make money. Does this idea interest you?"

"Sure. I'd like to know more about it," replied Francisco, fascinated.

"Well, Thompson has no money, and wants me to finance him. But I never put money in anything unless I know both the idea and the men putting it into operation. I like Thompson's idea, but I don't know him very well. If you'd go into it, I think I would. He thinks ten thousand dollars will put this thing over. I've a notion we could capitalize at fifteen thousand, you and I putting in five thousand each, giving Thompson the same amount for his idea and his agreement to operate the plant. You could act as business and sales-manager and purchasing agent. A dozen men, Thompson says, can turn out these new bearings; almost any old haymow will do for a factory; and one thousand dollars will provide the machinery and tools. How does it look to you?

"Big money is made in little companies," concluded Uncle Tom, "and little in big ones. That's the rule."

Francisco jumped at the plan on the three-stockholder basis, with Thompson and himself to draw forty dollars weekly, each. It looked like his big chance. He eagerly told Mr. Timpkins he would go into it and give it the best he had.

"You can count on me, Mr. Timpkins," said Francisco firmly. This new venture, requiring his winnings and some of his savings, to say nothing of the cherished Liberty Bonds, found him as cool as the fifth race at Hot Springs had found him feverish.

[N the course of a few days Mr. Timpkins had Thompson and Francisco together, and the three worked out preliminary plans. In a month the factory was under way, and in six months, although the process was by no means as glibly simple as he telling of it here, the Goe Bearings had earned their first semiannual dividend of eight per cent. It might as well have been ten, or at the rate of twenty per cent annually, but Uncle Tom thought the company ought to set aside four per cent a year for depreciation, surplus and such other things as interest bankers.

It was a tough summer for young Francisco Goe. He put in many long hours learning the mysteries of business from the inside, as contrasted to the external phases known superficially by any newspaper man. His years of training in the newspaper field served him well, but

he had to find out a whole lot of things about salesmanship, terms of sale, shipping and whatnot that no newspaper man ever dreamed of. During the six months he found no great amount of time to be with Esther; and between them, under a pact of silence, they said little more of their engagement than has been set down in these lines. But the boy, with his double incentive to make good, was working always with the girl in mind as his goal. Every bitter sales-problem was easier when his vision of Esther's blonde curls and smiling blue eyes appeared in the background of the solution. Every hot summer evening spent sweating over the books was the more bearable at the thought that Esther, at home, was quietly and furtively setting her own personal house in order against the day when they should not again be separated.

"Girl," said Francisco, one evening late in August, "we're over the hill with Wearing Bearings!"

"Over the hill?" she asked.

"Yep, we've made good. On September 15 we can declare and pay an eight-per cent dividend for the first six months. It might as well be twelve, but we're going to let the other four per cent stay in the business."

"That's great," exclaimed Esther. "Does Uncle Tom know about it yet?"

"Not definitely; I told him last week we might be able to do it, and tonight before closing up I went over the books and found we can. I'm going to tell him tomorrow morning."

"He'll be awfully glad, and you know I am, Frank," she said. "Uncle Tom's pretty strong for you now."

"That isn't all I'm going to tell him, either, girl," he continued, taking one of her hands in both of his. "It's been a long, hard fight, and a long, hard wait; but thank goodness both of them are about over."

NEXT morning when Thomas Timpkins reached his office at the Stock Exchange, he found Francisco Goe waiting for him. Francisco was somewhat nervous, but after the morning's greetings were exchanged, lost no time getting to the subject he had in mind.

"Well, young fellow," said Uncle Tom roughly in mock severity, "you wont sell any Wearing Bearings around here. You ought to be out at the factory right now.

Here it is eight-thirty, the middle of the forenoon, and you're not on the job."

"I wanted to speak to you about a couple of matters," explained Francisco. "In the first place, we're sure of twelve-per-cent earnings and an eight-per-cent dividend the first six months. I went over the books last night, and thought you'd like to know, first thing this morning. Everything's in good shape. Then there's another matter—er—" He cleared his throat, although he had not had a cold for six months.

"All right, that's fine about the company. I knew you two youngsters would make a winning team. We'll have a right tight little concern there in a year." "Uncle Tom leaned back in his chair to light a cigar. "What else have you on your chest?"

"It's—it's about Esther," said Francisco. "She—"

"She hasn't come down yet."

"No," Francisco grinned. "I came in early on purpose. She—that is, I—"

"OH, never mind the song and dance," interrupted Uncle Tom mercifully. I'll spare you the agony. It's all right with me, and I reckon it will be with her Aunt Josephine. Go ahead and talk to Esther." He blew a cloud of cigar-smoke at the boy and then sat and enjoyed the youngster's discomfiture. "You thought, I suppose, that we were blind as bats, eh? Didn't know what was going on between you two youngsters, eh? Well, there's no fool like the young fool who said there was none like an old one. I've been wise for about six months, young fellow. You go ahead and talk to Esther."

"But I have," protested Francisco.

"What? Oh, you have? Well, then, you're not as slow as I thought you were. When was that?"

"Six months ago," replied Francisco, grinning again, "and last night."

Uncle Tom broke into a laugh, stood up and grasped the boy's hand, and met the boy's sincere gaze with a friendly eye. Presently he sat down again.

"Frank," announced Uncle Tom, with the utmost deliberation, "I'm going to do a peculiar thing. I'm going to give Esther a thousand dollars of my Wearing Bearing stock as a wedding-present. I'm going to sell two thousand to Thompson, if he can raise the money, and I'm going to give you a chance at a thousand. That will

leave me one thousand. Thompson will have seven. You and Esther, between you, will have seven thousand, provided you can come through and take up your thousand in thirty days. You can have it at par, provided you do not borrow on any of your own Wearing Bearing stock. Never put up your best stock for collateral. Borrow any other way you like, or get the money any way you choose, except stealing. I want to see if you can dig up one thousand dollars in thirty days."

The announcement was a blow between the eyes for the boy. He recoiled from it, dazed and hurt, after his brief rest on the heights of enchantment a moment before. Uncle Tom did not give him time to recover, but continued:

"Wait a moment. I know it will be hard. It may take a terrible grind besides some resourcefulness on your part. But I want to see you do it, and I know you'll come through. It's up to you."

Francisco could not say much to this proposal, beyond agreeing to try it.

"Thanks, Uncle Tom," he managed to reply finally. "That's certainly mighty fine of you. I'll see if I can't make it."

Francisco felt it was a forlorn hope. He was tired from the long strain of the fight to put the company solidly on its feet. His nerves were ready to melt from the tension of half a year's restraint in the romance that filled his heart. He had no idea where to get the thousand, for he and Esther had already started plans for building on his two lots on the National Road, and he had borrowed the limit on his Bonds. They had planned to mortgage the lots in financing their house. His savings would survive their short honeymoon in the Virginia hills and set them up in a little apartment for the winter, but beyond that they would not go.

"I'm testing that boy's resourcefulness," explained Uncle Tom to his wife. "Nothing like meeting an obligation in a certain period to keep a man on edge. He'll meet it, too, or I'm much mistaken in him."

But he was somewhat dismayed, when Esther learned of his plan to test the boy's mettle—and burst into tears.

THAT afternoon Francisco stopped in the office of the *Press* to shake hands with the boys, and he made the rounds. In the composing room John Anderson slapped him on the back and congratulated him warmly.

"Boy," said the foreman, "you've never told me so, darn your hide, but I've got a notion it was that Francisco money that put you over in your new business. Hey? And gettin' over in the business was what put you over with the girl? If that's so, Frank, you certainly are in debt to me for my hunch way back there last spring. I'm buyin' some property with my winnings."

"That was a mighty day, John," Francisco answered. "And I'm sure obliged to you for tipping me off the way you did."

"Rats!" said John Anderson. "Forget it. I was only kiddin'. But listen—did you know this Francisco is gonna run at the Latonia meetin' in October? Fact! That ol' goat is gettin' good, I'll say."

"Is that so?"

"Sure is; but then I don't s'pose you'll be interested. For my part, I'm goin' to Cincinnati the day he starts, and get a little down on him, just for fun—nothin' big, you understand."

"Might put a nickel or two on him myself, just for old time's sake," said Francisco.

THREE weeks later, the honeymoon's first chapter ended, Francisco and Esther rolled into Cincinnati en route from the Virginia hills back to Indianapolis. They were to change trains at Cincinnati, and they had some time to wait. Nothing had marred their trip into the mountains. They were the happiest couple in Cincinnati when they left the train and strolled out of the smoke into the sunshine outside the station. Francisco, however, had begun to worry about that thousand dollars he needed to take up Uncle Tom's offer. He and Esther had talked about it a hundred times in their three weeks. Now, with only a few days remaining of the thirty and their return to Indianapolis and to work at hand, the thousand dollars was as far away as ever. Esther renewed her offer to sacrifice some savings, which Francisco for the fiftieth time indignantly refused. She suggested, for the fiftieth time, that they hold up their plans to build, and borrow the money on the lots, but he just as indignantly refused.

"Let's don't worry about it today," he said finally as they left the train. "It's the last day of our honeymoon, girl, and we can talk business when we get home."

Standing on the platform outside the station, Francisco bought a paper. After glancing at the first-page headlines, he

looked at the early financial report, and then turned to the sport-page.

"Look at this, Esther," he said. "Here's a horse named Francisco in the Latonia races, across the river!"

"Oh, what do you think of that? Let's go over—can we?"

"We'd have to miss our train and take a later one."

"That's easy. We can still get home before midnight. Let's do it! I'd love to see a good race, and root for Francisco."

Out they went to the old Latonia track, across the river in Kentucky's dark and muddy ground, buying sandwiches and ice-cream for lunch with all the naïve excitement of a pair of Sunday excursionists. They were in plenty of time to get good reserved seats in the stand.

It is not necessary to paint a picture of these two babes in the wood at the Latonia meeting. Everybody knows that in Kentucky, racing is racing, the same as horses is hosses, and everybody that goes, in Kentucky, loves the race for the sake of horse-flesh as well as for the sake of the wagering thrill. It was a horse crowd that filled the stands round about Francisco and Esther and overflowed along the rails. The two sat quiet, like cagey Hoosiers, and made no sign of their utter ignorance, although Esther did let slip one remark.

"Where is that paper, Frank? Let's look at it again."

He unfolded the paper and turned again to the sport-page.

"There he is," she said, pointing at the form sheet with a forefinger. "Look. It says 'Francisco, 4, b. g., by Little Frank.' The four means he's four years old, but what do you suppose the b. g. means, Frank? 'Begotten,' do you suppose? Francisco, begotten by Little Frank! Sounds like the Bible, doesn't it?"

A man next to them laughed aloud. Francisco paid no attention, for he was absorbed in other symbols of the form sheet. The figures "10 to 1" after the name of Francisco the horse had hypnotized him.

"Listen, Frank; I've got an idea!" exclaimed Esther, clutching his arm. "Are you permitted to bet on these races?"

"Why, I reckon," answered Francisco slowly, his mind in a daze.

"You go find out, wont you?"

Francisco turned to the man next him, who had laughed a moment before.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "We don't know much about this racing business, be-

cause in our country we don't race. Er—is there any betting permitted?"

"Sure, on them pari-mutuel machines," the man replied.

"What are they?"

"You get a ticket off one of them for two dollars, and if your horse wins, you get odds in percentages according to the number of people bettin' on your horse. At least, that's as near as I can explain it."

"Thank you!" And Francisco retold the story to Esther.

SHE insisted that he take four dollars of her money and go right down to those machines and get her two tickets on Francisco the horse. He took the money and went. At the foot of the stairs he bumped into John Anderson, foreman of the *Press* composing room, who had made good his announcement that he intended to see the old goat race. Anderson had taken the day off, as became an old racing fan, and journeyed down to Cincinnati and across to Latonia for the express purpose of seeing this one race.

"By George," exclaimed Anderson, "if it aint old Frank himself! Down to see the old namesake, hey?"

"John," said Francisco, inwardly committed to a long chance at his thousand dollars, "is there any betting here?"

"Is there any air here, you mean! Or any race track, or any sky up yonder. Cert'nly is, boy. Pari-mutuel machines for them that wants to bet a little, and other ways for them that wants to bet a lot. But listen, kid—don't you put any money on Francisco."

"Got to do it, John."

"He'll lose, sure. Don't ride a good horse to death. It's the third time, and the third time's a hoodoo. Black cats and ladders aint in it with third bets on the same horse, Frank. Lay off'm him."

"John, I need one thousand dollars by one week from today. Got to have it. This Francisco is at ten to one, and one hundred dollars might get me the thousand. Couldn't you get it down for me?"

"Well, if you must, you must. And if you do, I'll have to," said John Anderson. "But I'm afraid it's a bad hunch. I don't like it."

"But it's a good hunch, John. He's number three in the third race, and my third bet is bound to win. Three, third and three, see?"

"Kid, mebbe you're right. That sounds purty good—three, third and three."

"And listen, John," warned Francisco, handing him the money rather furtively, "if you come up in the stand and see me and my wife, don't say anything about it. We're in the front row. You can find us."

Then, after receiving directions as to the pari-mutuels, Francisco got the two-dollar tickets and went back to rejoin Esther. They bought a score-card and enjoyed the first two races in a perfunctory way, but as the time for the third race approached, they became enthusiastic.

"What's his number?" asked Esther.

"Number Three," Francisco replied aloud. To himself he added: "The third bet on Number Three and the third race. It's a hunch if there ever was one."

"There he comes now," exclaimed Esther in excitement. "Isn't he lovely?"

"Doesn't look much like a goat, does he?" Francisco did his best to suppress a wave of nervousness that grasped his frame.

"Goat? Why do you say that?"

"They call them goats, sometimes," Francisco explained lamely, shuddering at the thought he might betray the source of his slight racing knowledge.

THE horses paraded past the stand, five of them making up the field. In front of Francisco, a fair-looking bay with rangy legs and slim sides tipped off fore and aft with a heavy head and a long tail, were Beautiful Lady and Wham, numbered one and two. Behind Francisco came Arkansas Traveler and Brushwood, numbers four and five. Wham, the favorite, drew a round of applause, and so did Brushwood, rated second choice in the betting. Little attention was paid to Arkansas Traveler and Beautiful Lady, the former being a rank outsider and Beautiful Lady a notoriously notional mare, as befitted her name. Francisco had few followers aside from Francisco the Wearing Bearing man, and Esther. There was little delay in lining up the five at the barrier, for the start of their mile journey.

"That Francisco hasn't much spirit," commented Esther, calling attention to the placid, even lazy manner of the horse, which stood out in marked contrast with the other four facing the starter. Beautiful Lady was kicking up her heels and pawing the track by turns, while Arkansas Traveler was backing around in circles. Francisco was standing flat-footed, and

Ferguson, the little Irish boy on his back, was pulling his cap down with one hand as nonchalantly as if he were standing outside a dairy lunch after breakfast reading the morning paper.

Francisco did not answer Esther's comment, for he was nervously intent on the race. He licked his lips, and swallowed hard on the dry lump in his throat.

"They're off!" buzzed and hummed through the grandstand as the barrier flew up and the field sprang away down the track. Esther involuntarily clutched Francisco's arm. The boy felt for her hand and grasped it tightly in a perspiring grip. "Oh, look," cried Esther. "He isn't going."

FRANCISCO'S heart sank within him.

Out in front, streaking it for the first turn, was Wham, the favorite, a handsome chestnut colt running wild with his head down and his tail up. Beautiful Lady was in close pursuit, with Arkansas Traveler and Brushwood teaming along behind. But back at the barrier, only now starting slowly from his flat-footed stand, was Francisco the horse. The placid behavior that had marked him and his jockey proved to be either sleepiness or sloth. Ferguson woke up of a sudden, lifted the gelding's head by the reins with a sharp jerk, cracked him on the flank with the whip and jabbed at his sides with spurs on both boots. The startled Francisco jumped as if shot and fled down to the turn in wild gallop after the flying four in front. Long-legged and rangy, Francisco did not run. He flung himself over the ground in great leaping strides that, from the stands, made his jockey seem to hurdle through the air. As this jockey Ferguson's Irish grandfather would have said, Francisco was a long and lofty lepper.

"Watch him run," screamed Esther. But Francisco, at her side, was looking mournfully at the fleeing field, already well around the turn. He shook his head.

"No chance," he said.

"But look, look!" Esther replied after an instant. "He's gaining."

She pointed to the frantic Francisco on the track. The horse, still in terror of the punishment at the barrier, was fairly eating up the distance between himself and the laboring Brushwood and Arkansas Traveler. Ferguson sat tight on Francisco. Halfway round the turn, he could see the two nearest horses flinging clods. Fergu-

son flicked him on the shoulder with his whip, and the horse responded with another burst of speed that whirled him around the turn to the heels of the pair in front. Halfway down the back-stretch Francisco, on the outside, was head and head with Arkansas Traveler and Brushwood Boy. For ten giant strides he was lost to view from the stands, but before the far turn was reached, Francisco's heavy head swung out in front of the other two. An instant later Ferguson's head and shoulders showed beyond the heads of the two horses next the rail.

"He's in third place now," muttered Francisco, in the stand, to himself. "It's got to be a hunch. Number three in third place, with my third bet, in the third race. Come on, you Francisco!"

"Frank, you're positively in a cold sweat," exclaimed Esther, looking at him. "If you take my four-dollar bets so hard, we won't bet again, ever."

"Gets me all excited," admitted Francisco. "My namesake and all that. But look, Esther, he's gaining!"

THEY strained their eyes to see Francisco on the far turn. Ferguson was sitting tight, holding his horse for the hard run through the stretch after the leaders. He gave the long-leaping Francisco a slight breathing spell. But Beautiful Lady, worn out from her nervous, sprinting chase beside the seemingly tireless Wham, was dropping back. Her stride shortened to a choppy gallop, and Francisco went plunging up alongside her. At this point, slowly drawing ahead of Beautiful Lady, Ferguson did a snatch of thinking on the subject of overtaking Wham.

"If I was up front in that bird's place," he told himself, "I'd be givin' my hoss a little rest about now. Chances are tha's what he's doin'. Come on, rabbit! Let's run!"

He tickled Francisco's ribs with the spurs, picked up the horse's head in a tighter grip, and hunched a little farther forward over the bony shoulders. Francisco let out a link, and they gave chase to the chestnut colt in front.

"Frank, he is gaining, I do believe," said Esther, her heart beating faster.

As she spoke, Wham came swinging into full view along the rail into the stretch, lifting, reaching and falling in a rhythmic stride as graceful as it was effective in covering ground. His jockey, sitting pretty,

peered out from the right of the horse's head to glimpse the distance home. The race was in, he thought. Then he heard a clatter of hoofs, and startled, turned his head to look over his shoulder. Here came a crazy horse from nowhere.

Ferguson, a watchful eye out for the jockey's backward glance, slashed the lanky Francisco twice with the whip, and Francisco leaped wildly ahead to escape that ever-present punishment. Before the surprised jockey riding Wham could settle down and shake his mount together for the run home, Ferguson had frightened Francisco up to the leader's heel and was gaining inch by inch. He hung there for a second or two before Wham, under whip and spur, sprinted in a desperate effort to shake him off. Wham pulled out slightly, but Francisco came steadily on. Wham, tired after his long run with Beautiful Lady, could not keep up the terrific pace, and once more Francisco's leaping stride carried him up to Wham's heaving hips. Halfway down the stretch, his head was at Wham's saddle-cloth and the pair were running like mad. Ferguson slashed Francisco over the shoulders, and in three jumps more he was head and head with Wham.

Wham's jockey, seeing the race slipping from his grasp, cut the colt a series of wicked blows with his whip, and Wham gamely tried to respond. The best he could do was hold his nose even with Francisco's a few yards. Ferguson sat tight to the wire, hand-riding for all he was worth. Twenty yards from home he lifted Francisco's nostrils to the fore, and in ten yards more shoved the heavy head a foot in front. They flung under the wire with a margin so safe no judge could mistake it.

"Frank, *Frank*, you're hurting my hand," said Esther, a tear in each eye.

Francisco, startled out of his trance, looked around and down at her. He had bitten his lips until they bled, and just as unconsciously, had gripped her hand until the small bones cracked together.

"Dear, dearest," he said, at once contrite, taking her injured hand in both his own to rub and soothe it, "I'm sorry. Did it hurt much? I was crazy over the race."

"It's all right now. But Frank, you've bitten your lips! If racing affects you this way, we'll not come any more."

He smiled, an awkward smile, for he was ill at ease, and already wondering how he was going to tell her of his own betting.

"And we'll not bet any more," she declared.

"Never again!" he replied, so firmly and with such conviction that she looked at him in wonder.

John Anderson came along the front row of the stands just then, looking about for Francisco. He wore a broad grin, but suppressed it when he found the former financial editor and his bride. Taking off his hat, and acknowledging introduction to Esther, he said:

"Boy, I guess that old goat came along home, now, didn't he?"

"What do you mean, goat?" asked Francisco. "I'll say he's a horse."

"A gallopin' fool," declared Anderson enthusiastically. "You see, Mrs. Goe, Frank here had a hunch and put a bet on Francisco. So I did, too, and I feel purty good."

"How much did we win, Frank, twenty dollars? And how much did you win, Mr. Anderson?"

"Mrs. Goe, I'm ashamed to tell it, but I won a thousand dollars, and I can cert'nly use it on a house I'm buyin' up home."

"A thous—oh, my goodness! A thousand—why, Frank, if we'd only bet as much as Mr. Anderson did—"

"We did," said Francisco, wiping his forehead. He might as well make a clean breast of it.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Esther, and "Oh!" again, before she suddenly felt weak in the knees and sat down.

NEXT morning, after they reached Indianapolis, Francisco took his thousand dollars to Uncle Tom and received not only the Wearing Bearing stock but Uncle Tom's sincere congratulations on his ability to meet the proposal in thirty days.

"That's the way to get along in this world," declared Uncle Tom. "Set yourself a mark and then toe it. By the way, weren't you later getting home last night than you intended to be?"

"Yes, we stopped in Cincinnati to see the races," Francisco explained.

"Horse-races? I hope you weren't betting on them, young man."

"Esther won twenty dollars on a horse named Francisco," said the boy in an off-hand way. Then he added, truthfully enough: "But for my part, I've quit betting. I never bet, any more. I wouldn't bet a nickel that Friday pulls in ahead of Saturday."



The Curse of Hui Pa'o

*A very Chinese and very attractive story, by
the author of "Slaves of the Silver Serpent."*

By LEMUEL DE BRA

THOSE who slay themselves by way of reproach, after the custom of the Chinese, leave a frightful curse on their enemies," declared my good friend Chan Yin Do, nodding his head gravely. "It could not be otherwise. *Ts!* Have you never heard the remarkable tale of the pirate and the virtuous maiden?"

I bent over my dish of *Gai Woh Min*, and with the tiny silver fork separated the water-chestnuts, which I did not like, from the bamboo shoots and broiled pork, which I liked very much. The Chinese belief that to commit suicide on an enemy's doorstep inflicts a curse on the entire household had always impressed me as a silly relic of the superstitious past. Oddly enough, Mr. Chan, graduate of Yale, president of the Chinese League for Advancement, and leading spirit in every movement for the modernizing of China, believed it, or pretended to believe it, implicitly; but if he saw my covert smile, his sense of Oriental courtesy led him to overlook it. When I ventured to glance up, he was

lighting a cigarette; and I was struck by the way the match-flare brought out the polished bronze of his fine face and heightened the strange glow in his long dark eyes. And I was not surprised when presently Chan Yin Do, dropping into the weirdly musical tones of the Chinese, began this queer tale of the river-pirate and the maiden and the virtuous curse of Hui Pa'o.

FAR in the north, where China's Great Sorrow plows its course from the interior to the sea, there dwelt, in the days of the learned magistrate Sung Shih Hua, the mightiest of all the river-pirates. He was of the family of Han, named Yun; and of all the despicable caste of boat-dwellers, Han Yun was the most dreaded of all. He was at once the despoiler and the scavenger of the River Ho. When mothers wished to frighten their children into obedience, they would threaten: "Han Yun will get you!" When maidens lingered too long among the water lilies by the river's edge, their folk would run

quickly and find them, crying: "My Thousand of Gold! I thought Han Yun had stolen you!" And when boats would disappear in the night and the headless bodies of the owners be found propped up with bamboo poles in the mud and shallow water, the natives would hasten to their homes, lock their doors and burn devil papers, shouting: "*Aih-yah!*" Han Yun did that—Han Yun the pirate!"

Han Yun was truly a fierce and terrible man; but he had not always been a pirate. His father had spent many *taels* of silver on the young man's education; but Yun preferred the company of the singing girls to the quiet schoolroom, and so one day he ran away. And after his last copper cash had been spent for rice wine, he took work on a police-boat. Of all the *piao-chuan* that spent their days and nights hunting pirates on the River Ho, the police-boat of Han Yun soon came to be the most feared. But the discipline of the police-boat was very irksome to Han Yun, and one day he communed with himself over his fourth pipe of opium:

"I am but a dog for the Government and a slave for the officials! The poorest pirate on the Ho Kiang has as much rice and much more freedom than I."

SO, rising with sudden anger, he seized his sword and, alone, slew those of his comrades who did not quickly surrender, struck down the red banner of the police-boat, and from that hour became a river-pirate.

The officials sent their most powerful armed boats in search of Han Yun but they could not prevail against him. He slew their faithful, made pirates of their unfaithful, and either sunk their *piao-chuan* or converted them to his own use. Finally the Government engaged a passenger boat, decorated it with imperial streamers and red and yellow lanterns and sent a courier to Han Yun with a mandate to cease his piracies; but Han Yun met the *tsan-tzu-chuan* in midstream, slew the courier and flung him overboard.

Because of that mad act, an edict went out against Han Yun from the throne of of the Son of Heaven; but the pirate went his way unharmed. Soon other river-pirates came seeking his protection and guidance, and he organized them into a *kung-so*, or guild, until the pirates became such a powerful organization the poor natives were almost helpless.

IT was but a few moons, however, before Han Yun became weary of following the river and surfeited with gold and fine clothes and rich food and liquors, and he grew as fretful as one who seeks pleasure in a cold pipe or a bowl of stale tea. So one day, having eaten his rice and smoked his four pipes of opium, he struck a gong that called to his side his chief lieutenant, an old man of the family of Ch'u.

"Tonight," said Han Yun, "at the third hour after evening rice, we shall go to the nearest village, seize the principal elders and levy tribute."

Ch'u bowed thrice and sucked in his breath lest it offend the august person of his master.

"Yes, sire; it shall be done. But because of the great drought, the villages in this province are starving. What gold the elders could command has already been sent away to buy food."

"What matter, son of a turtle? I do not seek more gold."

"Yes, sire. But the rice and tea and bean-curd which the elders sent for has not yet arrived, and—"

"Silence!" roared the pirate, seizing his heavy opium-pipe. "You chatter like a child playing with his Fifteen Magic Blocks. I do not seek food or drink or raiment."

Ch'u backed away. "Yes, sire," he ventured, then fell silent, not knowing what to say.

Han Yun restored the pipe to its place by the opium-lamp. His evil temper passed as quickly as it came. Like an opium-dreamer, he yawned and stretched; and the silken sleeves of his blouse fell away from his great arms, disclosing the three gold and jade bracelets he wore on each wrist—bracelets that had once been intended as a gift for the Emperor.

"*Aih*, I find no more pleasure in life," said Han Yun. "I am like the stupid priests of the Great Pure, who go hither and thither seeking a balanced heart and finding it not. And on reflection it seems that I have made so much ado about small things that I have left more pleasant things undone."

Then from a bamboo rack he took a small book richly embossed in crimson ink and marked with a gilt cord and a disk of pure white jade.

"Of the thousands of books in the great library in the Imperial City, books written mostly by withered old men, this book

is the most loved of all. It was written centuries ago by a poet, a hale fellow who scribbled his verses only when his head was happy with spiced wine. And in this book we find this verse:

"Oho! Do men love music and feasting? Do men love fierce battle and the pursuit of profit? Yes, all of these. But more than all of these, yea, more than life itself, *they love the love of women!*"

Again the imperturbable Ch'u bowed thrice and sucked in his breath. "Yes, sire," he made prompt answer. "It shall be done this night!"

DURING the months that followed, many villages were deflowered of their fairest maidens; and aboard the *chuan* of Han Yun there was much revelry, much feasting and dancing and drinking of spiced wine. Han Yun grew fat as a market pig, and his sword-arm lost much of its terrible skill. And although he selected only the comeliest of the river maids, he soon grew weary of them.

"River swine!" he called them one morning, spitting out the epithet as one spews out sour rice. "Their servile manners disgust me. Is there in all these villages no maid of spirit and learning?"

"Yes, sire," replied Ch'u, "since these mud-hens were brought aboard, one hears much gossip from many quarters. And I have heard tell of a famous virgin named Hui Pa'o."

"Precious Wit!" echoed the pirate. "What a curious name for a girl! What a fortunate name if, indeed, she deserves it! For I am of a mind to seek her at once. What is her family name?"

"She is of the family of Ong."

"What is her age?"

"They say she has eaten for eighteen years."

"Her province?"

"Her venerable father is one of the principal elders of the Village of Golden Pebbles."

"*Aih!* That is but sixty *li* down the river. We shall set forth at once. Well, Ch'u, have you lost the use of your old legs?"

"Sire, I crave pardon for my impudence; but I must tell you more. This virgin Hui Pa'o is not like many of these others who are not averse to wearing your silks and eating your food. The father of Hui Pa'o is rich, and the girl has been educated in the classics."

"How fortunate! If she pleases me, I shall take her to wife."

"But she is already betrothed," went on Ch'u. "She is to wed one of the officials of the province. And that is not all. The fear of you has gone abroad up and down the river villages, and many of the young maidens are prepared to slay themselves rather than fall into your hands. So with Precious Wit. She carries always a vial of powerful poison. Should we approach the village, she will retire to her chambers with her maids. Should you enter and threaten her—"

Han Yun roared a frightful curse. "*Aih!* One cannot pluck fruit from a dead vine!" he cried. And with that he struck the gong fiercely; and when a servant entered and began cooking opium over the lamp, Ch'u glided silently from the room. He knew that his master desired to smoke in peace; and he knew, moreover, that much devilry can be brewed over an opium lamp.

ONG YI'H was at late rice with his daughter, Hui Pa'o, when a messenger brought word that a police-boat had stopped at the village and that the official in charge sought an immediate meeting with the elders. The purpose of the meeting had not been made known to the messenger, but it was the gossip that it pertained to the pirate Han Yun, who was believed to be coming down the river.

The elders lost no time gathering at the house of Ong, and were there assembled in their ceremonial robes when the visitor, with two aides, arrived. He wore black crape trousers with white leggings and a gorgeously embroidered satin blouse with the silken emblem of his office. At his side hung a long sword with a corded hilt. He made the customary three polite bows, then wasted no further time in ceremony.

"I am the unworthy emissary of our Government," he said in rapid Mandarin. "I have been sent to you with a plan to destroy that scourge of the river, Han Yun the pirate. From many quarters you have doubtless heard the gossip of his latest crimes—how he has brought deep sorrow to many homes by carrying away their young girls of marriageable age, and who are never heard of again. The plan of the Government will destroy this shark by turning his own crimes against him; but its success depends on your assistance, and absolute secrecy."

The elders nodded their heads, but held silent.

"It is the latest practice of Han Yun," went on the visitor, "to disguise his boat as a pleasure-ship or a fishing-craft, and drawing near to shore, take note of the maidens who go down to the river to wash their clothes or to gather water-lilies. Han Yun approaches the one of his choice, begs a cup of tea, and on being served, seizes the girl and returns quickly to his boat and disappears.

"Word has been brought to me that this pirate is now coming down the river and that he intends to sack your village. What we do, we must be about without delay. I request that one of you take two or three of the fairest maids of your village and go with me up the river to the Beach of Leaping Carp. There, while I and my men are in hiding, the girls will go early in the morning to the river's edge and while awaiting the coming of Han Yun, pretend to be washing linen. Han Yun is but a few *li* up the river and may come at any hour. If he is attracted by the maidens, they must show no fear. When he asks for tea, they will serve him. Then, quickly, we will strike."

AGAIN the elders nodded their heads; and after about the time it takes to sip a bowl of tea, one of them spoke:

"*Aih!* Han Yun has the heart of a serpent, and may it be gouged out with dull cleavers. Your plan is a fortunate one. I gladly accept the honor of accompanying you."

"With your permission, sir official, I will ask a question," spoke up Ong Yi'h. "Why is it necessary to leave tonight? Why not at sunrise?"

"Because the current is strong and we must be at the Beach of Leaping Carp before dawn. That, as you know, is the best place to set such a trap."

"Yes," agreed Ong after a short silence, "that is true." He turned to his companions. "You think we should assist this official?"

"Yes, venerable Ong, we do. It is a request of the Emperor."

"Then let it be so," concluded Ong Yi'h. "But the duty and the honor is mine. None of you can afford to leave your families or your business or your crops. I shall go—I and my Thousand of Gold, Hui Pa'o."

"But," objected one of the elders, "your

Precious Wit is the fairest and most beloved of the village. Would it not be better—?"

"It is as the official says," interposed Ong politely. "The maid must be one to attract the pirate; and who can do that better than my moon-bright daughter? Besides, the risk, as I view it, is about even. Han Yun may pass the Beach of Leaping Carp. In that event, while he is attacking the village, I and Hui Pa'o will be safe up the river with the police-boat."

There was more talk, but in the end Ong prevailed. It was agreed that he and Hui Pa'o, with two of her maids, would be at the river's edge a half-hour before moonrise. They would go prepared to spend the night on the police-boat and to lay the trap the next morning for Han Yun. Thereupon the visitor made the required ceremonial bows and left.

HUI PA'O quickly fell in with the plan when her father told her. It would be a fine adventure; and when her hands grew cold at the thought of serving tea to the dreaded pirate, she fortified herself by picturing the honor that would be hers when the pirate had been captured.

Servants carried Ong and Hui Pa'o in sedan chairs down a back street to the river, and there they found a large flat-bottomed boat with two men waiting. One of the men arose.

"You are venerable Yi'h, of the family of Ong?"

"Yes. Where is the official?"

"He waits for you. Let us hasten."

Ong looked up. A large craft lay at some distance from the shore, its red police-banner visible in the light from the ship's lanterns. Without more ado Ong and Hui Pa'o entered the rowboat, and the men took up the oars, chanting a low, weird song as they timed their rowing.

Precious Wit looked back at the village, silent and dark save for a few yellow lights here and there; and whether it was a sudden feeling of fear, or the chill of the wind that at that moment came over the waters, she drew near her father, trembling.

"Courage, child!" whispered Ong. "I shall always be near you."

"Yes, Father," Hui Pa'o smiled bravely. "I shall not fear. And when Han Yun has been beheaded, as he deserves, you will be proud of me."

As they gained the deck of the large

boat, a young man with the air of an official approached Ong's party and bowed courteously.

"The Imperial Representative of the Son of Heaven commands me to say that you and your daughter are wanted at once in the cabin. All others are to remain on deck for the present."

Ong bowed, and with Precious Wit clinging to his arm, followed the man down the deck between rows of colored lanterns. The deck seemed deserted; but in the gloom back of the lanterns there was much activity. Ong caught glimpses of moving figures. The boat started upstream.

The messenger paused before a doorway curtained with beaded portières behind which was still another curtain of heavy brocaded silk. He drew the curtains aside. Ong and Hui Pa'o entered.

The cabin was lighted only by the dim glow of a large crimson lantern suspended from the ceiling above a teakwood desk. Seated at this desk, a brass gong at his elbow, was the uniformed man who had called on the elders.

"Promptness is a splendid virtue," he said as he stood up and bowed stiffly. "If our plan succeeds, I shall commend you and your daughter to the Emperor." And he smiled at Hui Pa'o.

THE girl had arrayed herself in her best and was, indeed, beautiful. Her trousers and jacket were of finest Shantung silk embroidered with threads of gold and wistaria. Her lips were full and red; her face was as smooth and fair as pure ivory, and her glossy black hair was set off by a single ornament of wrought gold set with brilliant sapphires. Conscious of the man's admiring gaze, Hui Pa'o lowered her eyes demurely.

"Tardiness would be a great sin in the present circumstance," said Ong Yi'h.

"True. Let us set ceremony aside and get to the matter in hand. After reflection it has occurred to me that instead of having your daughter serve the pirate with tea it would be safer to give him drugged wine. Unfortunately, however, we left so hurriedly that I find we have no poison in my stores. Could you return with my men and secretly obtain a supply at the village?"

"With pleasure, sir official; but if it is not presumptuous, may I say that many maidens in the river villages fear Han Yun more than death itself, and against his coming they carry always a vial of deadly

poison with the determination never to fall into the pirate's hands alive. So with my daughter. *Aih!* How much better to give that deadly draught to Han Yun!"

"Indeed!" cried Hui Pa'o. "I shall give it gladly. Do you wish to see it?" And blushing modestly, the girl turned aside, unfastened her jacket, and took from her bosom a small vial of colorless liquid.

"How fortunate!" exclaimed the man in uniform, taking the vial from Hui Pa'o. Is this all you have?"

"It is, sir official."

"Then, oh!" cried the man, giving the brass gong a sharp blow. "The trap is sprung! Now for the game! For know you, old man, that I am Han Yun the pirate!"

Four men dashed into the cabin. Before old Ong could utter a cry, he was wriggling horribly on the blade of a long two-edged sword. The girl, her hands clutching at her white throat, gave a shrill scream of mortal terror and fainted. Han Yun gathered her up in one arm and strode from the room.

WHEN Hui Pa'o awakened, she found herself lying in the magnificent cabin of the pirate. About her was such splendor as she had imagined existed only in imperial palaces. River maids, garbed as slaves, waited upon her. She was bathed in perfumed waters and dressed in sumptuous robes of brocaded silk. About her slender white throat were strung necklaces of purest amber and jewels of priceless worth. Her girdle was fastened with a buckle of yellow jade that had once adorned the belt of an ancient emperor.

After a time Han Yun entered and saluted Hui Pa'o with grave triumph. Dazzled by the splendor of the pirate, the slaves fell on their faces before him; but not Hui Pa'o. Through her tears she could scarcely see the shining ceremonial armor with its elaborate gilding and embroidery, the helmet adorned with sable-tails, and the two eagle-feathers painted with gold. She saw only the huge, two-handed executioner's sword at the pirate's side, and thinking of her father, shuddered and almost fainted again.

"All the riches of the Ho are mine," Han Yun told her; "and they shall be yours, too, Precious Wit."

Hui Pa'o made no reply. She knew that her father was dead and that she was helpless in the hands of the pirate—helpless

save for the mercy of the gods. "The Eye of Heaven sees all things," she told herself over and over. "Merciful Hearer of Prayers, hear me now!"

Then, like a true daughter of Ong, she repressed the waters of sorrow that came to her eyes and at Han Yun's command followed him from the room to where a banquet table had been spread. She did not refuse the tiny bowl of Precious Dew of Roses wine that was served her, nor the mandarin fish nor any of the nine times nine dishes that were brought to the feasting; and because of her resignation, Han Yun admired her greatly, and becoming more and more eager to possess her, ended the banquet suddenly by ordering the Imperial tea.

ALL arose and cast eyes at Hui Pa'o. She had been taught many things from the August Book of Ceremonial Rites and knew what was expected of her. Trembling inwardly, but outwardly calm, she took the golden bowl of steaming tea in both hands, spilled a little on the floor to her left, then to her right, and with an odd mingling of humility and dignity, knelt before Han Yun.

The banquet hall felt silent. All pressed near to see Hui Pa'o and to hear what she would say. For in giving the cup of ceremonial tea to her future husband, it was required of the girl to make some speech.

Han Yun, garbed in his shining ceremonial armor, and sitting very straight and severe in his great chair of elaborately carved teakwood, was no more striking in appearance than the slender girl who presently uprose before him. Very proudly she stood in her marriage robes of silk and gleaming jewels. Her face was as white as cold marble, but there was fire in her dark eyes.

"*Aih-yah hoh lien!*" cried Precious Wit in tones that reached every ear. "I, Hui Pa'o, daughter of Ong, invoke the Mother of Heaven and the Seven Just Gods in the Courts of the Dead! Bring down upon this monster my virtuous curse! Let him be marked as a thing of evil and shunned by all men! Let disease strike his limbs, and let his heart be turned to water. And since like a vulture he has preyed on the river, so by the river let him perish!"

Then, swiftly, the girl snatched an ancient copper knife from where it adorned the wall. Before any could stop her, she pressed the point to her bared breast.

With a moan of pain, Hui Pa'o fell at the pirate's feet, and died.

WITHIN the hour, two armed police-boats attacked the pirate's fleet. Han Yun, enraged by the failure of his plot, and horribly frightened by the curse of Hui Pa'o, had driven his men from the banquet-room and gone to his cabin with a jar of strong wine. At the sound of battle he roused himself with difficulty, and clad only in pajamas, snatched up a sword and staggered out on deck. He saw his men putting up a half-hearted battle against heavy odds, and a great fear seized him. He tried to shout, but the words choked in his throat; his hands trembled so he could scarcely hold his sword; and Han Yun, who never before had known fear, knew that his heart had indeed turned to water.

Then suddenly Han Yun found himself surrounded by uniformed men from the police-boat. He swung his sword, and they fell away; but the pirate knew it was because of the fear of him and not because of his swordsmanship; for of a truth his arm seemed suddenly to have lost its skill. Before he could be upon them again, a great hue and cry went up from his men, and he saw then that two of the boats were on fire, and his men were leaping overboard, crying: "The curse is upon us—the curse of Hui Pa'o." Mad with the terror that had seized him, Han Yun turned and fled. As he sprang over the rail, a police official swung his heavy sword, and the keen-edged point severed the cords of Han Yun's right knee.

Notwithstanding the darkness and the confusion of battle, Han Yun had several narrow escapes before he reached the river's edge. The mud seemed possessed of a diabolic desire to drag him down, and the tangle of lilies and long grasses seemed determined to bind and hold him. Dumb with uncontrollable fright, and utterly exhausted, the pirate finally dragged himself into a pulse-field and tore strips from his pajamas to bind his bleeding knee.

The river was now lighted up with a frightful glow, and the night was hideous with the shout of battle and the screaming of dying men. Unable to stand on his wounded leg, Han Yun sat down and viewed the scene with strange calmness. He knew he had come to the end. His boats were burning, his men being slaughtered. Ere long, torchbearers would be

searching the surrounding fields for the escaped pirate.

"Ten thousand curses on that virgin!" cried Han Yun, and began crawling through the pulse-field.

AFTER a dreadful night Han Yun came at dawn to a clump of bamboo near a deserted farmhouse, and there he spent the day in feverish sleep. His leg was badly swollen. His only food was a few grains of dry rice that had been overlooked by the starving harvesters, his only drink a few swallows of brackish water. He fashioned a crutch of bamboo, and at nightfall continued his flight.

In the days and nights that followed, Han Yun, half-starved, and babbling hysterically with fever, struggled on, possessed with but one thought—to get away from the river. He wakened one afternoon to find himself surrounded by a dozen or more men, ragged and half-starved like himself. Mistaking the pirate for another sufferer from the drought, they prepared him cooling tea and shared their bits of dried meat and cold rice, and for days he traveled with them. When they came to a village, and several desired to end their journey there, Han Yun asked:

"How many li are we from the River Ho?"

"A hundred *li*," a native made answer.

"It is not enough," muttered Han Yun, and started on. And thereafter, at each village, he would ask the same question: "How many *li* are we from the River Ho?" So finally, about the twentieth day of the second moon of his flight, Han Yun came to a village over three hundred miles to the south of the River Ho. There, in an abandoned hut, he took up his abode. Because a disease had settled in his wounded leg, he could not work in the fields and had to earn his rice doing menial tasks for the tradesmen. Having taken another name, he often made bold to ask the villagers if they had heard of Han Yun, the pirate; and thus, one day, he was told that the pirate had drowned. "Well," communed Han Yun with himself that night, "at least I am safe here from the vengeance of the Ho. That virgin said I would perish by the river; but I have broken the curse at last."

It was but a few days later that the great drought ended and the parched fields

were singing with rain. When the rain persisted, however, the villagers began to shake their heads and mutter. Han Yun, hobbling into the village one morning between storms, found the natives in great panic. Goods of all sorts, with mats of rice and strings of dried meat, were being thrown hastily into carts, and whole families were struggling through the mud toward the hills in the south. "What!" cried one, when Han Yun ventured a question. "Have you not heard? China's Great Sorrow is coming."

"*Aih-yah!* You mean the River Ho?"

"The Ho is coming."

"Impossible!" cried Han Yun. "It is more than three hundred miles to the north."

"The River Ho is coming," repeated the native, almost dumb with fright. "Something has put a curse on us. Unless we flee, we shall all perish."

Han Yun beat his forehead with his fists, and crying frightful curses, hobbled down the muddy road after the carts; but because of his affliction he was soon worn out and left far behind. Looking back, Han Yun perceived a huge, snakelike stream winding and twisting its way down the valley, and with amazing rapidity the flood water crept upon the fleeing man. It covered his feet, his knees, and crept up to his waist. With horrible certainty the water crept higher and higher until, there on that mud road in Shantung, Han Yun, the great pirate, starving, in tatters, sank beneath the pursuing waters of the River Ho and perished.

THOUGHTFULLY, I refilled our bowls with the steaming Dragonbeard.

"Rather an odd coincidence, Mr. Chan," I said. "Everyone knows that some years ago the River Ho jumped its course and plowed a new bed, entering the ocean over three hundred miles south of its original mouth."

"Certainly, my friend," replied Chan Yin Do, dropping into the precise English he had acquired at Yale. "But,"—and as he waved a slender hand in that gesture that is typically Chinese, I felt sure I saw an amused gleam in his dark eyes,—"but I haven't been telling you *what* the River Ho did. I've been telling you *why*. It was because of the curse—the virtuous curse of Hui Pa'o."



Spud's Probation

The author of "The Double Cross of Honor" and "The Prodigal," is at his best in this interesting story of a boy in difficulties.

By GEORGE L. KNAPP

BUCK GIBSON, whose baptismal name was Walter Grybowski, esteemed himself a hard-boiled egg, and was proud of it. He waited in the settlement-house reception-room with his hat on, and his thumbs hooked belligerently into the waistband of his trousers. But when Mrs. Pridham, head of the settlement, entered, something constrained Buck to remove his lid, trust his arms to the shoulder attachments provided by nature, and respond to the matron's greeting with a polite:

"Good mornin', ma'am."

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes ma'am. I—we—I mean, the gang, they sent me—we want to see about gettin' a room."

"A room?"

"Yes'm—place to meet for the bunch, you know."

"I see. Who are in the bunch?" Mrs. Pridham's questions were not due entirely to a desire for information. She

knew enough about Buck and his associates to have surprised that young near-hoodlum mightily, but she wanted to see how much of his toughness was real and how much a pose. Buck answered, unsuspecting of the self-revelation he was giving:

"Why — ma'am — we — we're just a bunch o' kids, over here on Pell Street." All impulse to brag about the extreme moral hardihood of his associates seemed to have left him, and he spoke with a sincere if awkward effort to put the best foot foremost. "We been meetin' over Wasem's place, but he's stuck up the rent, see, an' we got to go. So I come to see you."

"Were you making trouble for Mr. Wasem?"

"Hunh? Trouble? For that—that egg? Say, ma'am, you don't know Jake Wasem. He eats trouble. That's what makes him fat. Naw, he just wants to get rid of us; I don't know why."

IT happened that Mrs. Pridham did know why. Wasem's business as a boot-legger was growing so fast that he wanted the rooms over his former saloon to use in more profitable ways. But she did not care to show her knowledge, and turned to practical details.

"How many are there in your club?"

"'Bout twenty-five."

"How old are they?"

"I'm sixteen." He was a scant fifteen, but he was big enough to pass for two years older, and his size helped him to evade school. "Most of the kids are fifteen. Spud—Spud Gordon, he's fourteen. So's Izzy Shamanski. They're the smallest that really belongs. Spud has that nut cousin of his taggin' along, some of the time, but he aint one of the push."

"What is the name of your club?"

"Name? We aint got one."

"Who's your president?"

"We aint got a president. We're just a bunch o' kids, comin' together for a good time. We don't hurt nobody."

"Haven't you any organization or officers at all?"

The question was put in a tone that made Buck ashamed to answer in the negative, but he had no choice. He was not quick with his tongue. If he had brought Spud along, now, that snappy guy would have cracked some joke to gain time and then wriggled out of the hole. Buck, perforce, blurted out the truth:

"No ma'am. We aint got nobody. What's the good of all that officer truck, anyhow?"

Mrs. Pridham explained. There must be an organization to enable the boys to act together. There must be officers with whom the settlement-house could deal and know it was dealing with the club. Mrs. Pridham knew that through this channel thousands of city lads get their first grasp of business, responsibility and the need of keeping agreements; and she did not allow the explanation to become perfunctory. Buck saw the point, but he did not see how he would explain it to the gang.

It was spring, and he was to report to the bunch that evening on one of the few vacant lots in the neighborhood. There was a full attendance. Buck stated the case more clearly than he had hoped. The boys accepted the need of organization rather dumbly—but how were they to go about it?

"The first thing," said Izzy Shamanski,

"is to see what name we have." The lads looked at each other, and a dry voice from near the front of the gathering spoke:

"Let's call ourselves the Troztkys, an' make a soviet."

The manner of the remark was at least as amusing as the matter of it, and there was a general laugh. Buck only grinned; and young Shamanski, who already, in imagination, was fitting himself to be a lawyer and politician, returned to the charge:

"They wont let us in if we got a moniker like that. 'At's a bunch o' patriotic stiffs. We got to give 'em somethin' we can get by with."

"The Izzys, then," said the first speaker. "They can get by with anything."

There was another laugh, and the aspiring attorney muttered sulkily and dug his toe in the ground. But the question of a name remained. Buck was making visible efforts to get hold of an idea, but without success. "Spit up somethin', can't you?" he begged plaintively. "Spud, you find us a real name."

Spud Gordon, the lad who had made the two previous suggestions, put one hand on his stomach and the other on his forehead, in an attitude which might mean either deep thought or internal distress. The response from his audience was half a giggle and half a growl. Half opening his eyes to simulate a person coming out of a trance, he caught sight of a figure that gave him the coveted idea.

"I move this club be christened the Gannertys," he said.

THE chief outdoor sport of the "Pell Street bunch," now organizing into a club, was their feud with Aloysius Gannerty, a grocer one block south. Gannerty had any quantity of desirable plunder, and displayed it in ways which no rival dared copy. He had also a swift foot, a heavy hand, a suspicious mind, and a tongue that a professional evangelist might envy. He could give a half-hour lecture on the ancestry, habits, appearance and probable destination of some street-urchin without once repeating himself, or he could pack a page of denunciation into a single barbed epithet. The boy who managed to swipe an orange or a pear from Aloysius Gannerty had earned it. Still, the thing had been done, once that very afternoon; and the boys regarded the grocer

with that derisive good humor which one feels to an adversary who is good, but not quite good enough. The name was adopted with a yell.

"That ought to hold 'em a while," remarked Buck; and then he had an inspiration himself. "I move Spud Gordon be elected president of this club," he called. For an instant there was silence; and then, as the lads read Buck's purpose in his grin, came another shout of approval. As if this ended all business, the gathering broke up. Spud and Isidore were left staring at each other, and for the first time in months, neither had anything to say.

TO know how Spud felt, you must know something of his origins. He was a cross-breed, which means a nature not wholly at peace with itself. His father, a hard-headed but romantic Scot, went to a manufacturing town in Poland to install some machinery for his firm, fell in love with a pretty Polish girl, married her after a tempestuous wooing, and brought her to America—and his relatives spoke their mind about the match. Here, three months before his only child was born, he died. A few years later his widow followed him; and Spud was left to the care of his mother's brother, a fine fellow, but not famed for urbanity, earning only moderate wages, and with six children of his own. He accepted his duty in much the same spirit that he would have accepted a visitation of scarlet fever.

Under such circumstances a boy has about three ways of making his existence tolerable. If gifted with a strong physique, he can fight his way to that consideration which a lad must win somehow or hate himself. If cunning and callous, he can achieve still greater advantages by becoming a sneak. Spud was gentler and less sturdy than his older cousins, and some outcroppings of the Scotch conscience showed in him rather early. Therefore he took the third course, made himself court-jester to the powers that ruled his fate, and placated life by clowning with it. His aunt, to be sure, had a somewhat defective sense of humor, but she was softened by the care which Spud took of her youngest son, now about ten years old, and classed as "retarded" by a euphemistic school-board.

And now Spud was president of the

newly organized club of the Gannertys. He realized, dimly, that this was a tribute to his joking powers, but did not grasp the fact that he was considered a joke himself. He turned to his rival.

"Say," he said, "we got to see about that room. You be secretary."

After enough demur to show his superior knowledge, Isidore agreed.

FOR a nominal sum the Gannertys got the privilege of meeting once a week in one of the clubrooms in the basement of the settlement house.

They had the further privilege of the gymnasium two nights a week, and being numerous enough to fill the small quarters, had a period these nights to themselves. The physical director promptly established an understanding.

"I hear you're a scrapper, Buck," he said. "Let's see you do this." He caught the horizontal bar, turned over it with a graceful, effortless-looking sweep, poised rigid for a moment, and dropped lightly to the floor. Buck tried, kicking and floundering, but in vain.

"Takes practice," commented the director. "Better let me give you a light workout." He did, and when that "light" session was ended, the perspiring and breathless Gannertys were in no mood to start trouble with anyone.

Spud alone saw through the director's wiles, and wished devoutly that he could find an equally effective way to manage the business meetings of the club. The club had accepted Isidore as secretary without the formality of an election. He was the only one of the Gannertys who knew anything about rules of order or methods of transacting business, and he used his knowledge to gain *éclat* for himself at the expense of Spud. The latter found himself helpless. There was no chance for clowning. The lads were alone, in a room barely big enough to hold them, considering matters of coöperation with the other clubs, taking part in contests and the like. Every meeting developed a wrangle which left everyone in a bad temper.

Coming out in this frame of mind one evening, two of the Gannertys started a fight. Spud stood by, helpless, while Buck urged it on. The physical director appeared, gripped the fighting boys, swung them apart with the ease born of long practice, and ordered the larger to get outdoors. Then he turned on Buck.

"What do you mean by allowing this rough stuff?" he demanded.

"Aw, they wouldn't hurt anything," returned Buck, and added as an afterthought:

"I aint president of the bunch, anyway."

The director made a few more remarks, about equally divided between Spud and Buck. The smaller boy went home, overwhelmed with self-reproaches. Buck, to show that he could not be feazed by any call-down, sauntered into the library and spoke to the young woman in charge:

"Got that book you was goin' to show me?" he demanded insolently. Miss Myers looked him over, and he began to feel uncomfortable. He made another effort:

"What's eatin' you?" he asked. The girl completed her inspection and answered:

"I don't care for roughnecks, Mr. Grybowski. The book isn't in."

Buck turned on his heel and left the house. The next evening, after gymnasium practice, he sought speech with the director.

IT happened that Spud passed the room where Buck and the director were talking; Spud heard his own name, and stopped to listen.

"We'll cut out the rough stuff," Buck was saying, "but Spud can't keep no order."

"What did you make him president for, then?" returned the director.

"We done it for a joke," Buck confessed. "We—we wanted to kid you folks. Spud, he—he's always makin' jokes, an' we thought we'd make him a joke on you."

"Strikes me the joke's on the Gannertys," remarked the director.

"Yes sir," said Buck humbly. "But we want to fix it up right, now."

"It isn't so much fun to be hard-boiled eggs as you thought it was, eh? Well, that's good. But you've put Spud in, and you've got to be fair to him. He's got more brains than the rest of your bunch put together, if he could just get the hang of using 'em."

More than this Spud did not hear. He slipped away, suffering as only a sensitive boy can at the revelation of his unimportance in the eyes of his mates. He had brains, but he was no good. He wasn't expected to be any good. They had put him in for a joke—he was a joke. But he'd show 'em! He'd learn 'em to play tricks like that on him! He—Spud went

through the secret dramatics in which every boy indulges when his heart is too full to hold any more. But because he had "more brains than the rest of the bunch put together," he got very little comfort out of this ancient brand of self-consolation.

If a timid person always were a weak or cowardly one, Spud would not have gone to the next meeting. He did go. After the routine business, which went somewhat more smoothly than usual, Buck arose, hemmed and hawed, made half a dozen false starts, but at last got down to his subject. The Gannertys were on the wrong track, he told them. There was nothing in being tough—at least not in that place. There was no use acting as if everything was a joke. They must have order. He moved that the president be put on probation—Buck was familiar with that phrase from personal experience; but the next one troubled him and he consulted a slip of paper—he put on probation for four months to fit himself for the duties of his position. Spud put the motion, declared it carried, declared the meeting adjourned, and managed to get out into the sheltering darkness of the alley before his sobs had their way with him.

THERE were only two or three more meetings before the summer vacation, and Spud did his best to manage these in better fashion. He did it, too, thanks to a study of Roberts' rules of order and the unsought but gratefully welcomed suggestions of the physical director. But the Gannertys, their minds once slanted in the direction of seriousness, counted Spud a failure and made no secret of their feelings, and this was a barrier over which the lad could not climb. He was glad when the summer intermission began, and he was profoundly sorry, just before school recommenced, to be asked to call a special meeting. The occasion for it, however, was enough to compensate him for many trials. Some wealthy gentlemen of a downtown club were going to give the Gannertys a picnic in the country—taking them out in a couple of trucks early in the morning, and bringing them back late in the afternoon.

Spud was working that summer in a flivver garage, the paternal gift for mechanics helping him somewhat, and he readily arranged for a day off. His pleasure was tempered by the announcement that he would have to take with him the

retarded youth Aleck; but he had grown used to that handicap. Isidore Shamanski supplied another chastening influence.

"You got yourself fit for president yet?" he inquired, loudly enough for the truck-load to hear. "Your probation's up pretty soon."

"You mind your own business!" retorted Spud, and then thought of a flank attack:

"Izzy thinks he's goin' to be President of the United States, an' he wants to practice on us."

The discussion started by this remark kept Isidore busy during the rest of the trip.

THE trucks cleared the city, drove southwest on a concrete highway for several miles, enjoyed a brief race with an electric interurban train whose course paralleled their own, then turned to the right, traversed a poorer road for a couple of hilly miles, and stopped in a piece of woodland which was announced by a board at the entrance to be part of a forest preserve. The Gannertys tumbled from the truck with whoops of glee, and the picnic was on.

It was a chaotic affair. The physical director had been unable to come, and though the drivers of the trucks were good fellows and one of them knew more than a little about camping, there was no adult who knew this particular gang of boys. Spud tried to help keep order, but aside from the hampering presence of Aleck, his efforts merely reminded the Gannertys that he had been called in question as a presiding officer, and they paid no attention to him. Buck finally took a hand, and shook two of the more obstreperous members into shape. This quieted things enough to make lunch possible, and the meal exerted its usual calming influence. And then Spud's real troubles began.

Across the road from their picnic ground was a farmstead, house, barns and orchard, especially orchard. The house was on rising ground from which the orchard sloped down to meet a pasture at the rear and a cornfield at the side; and through the leaves the boys could catch the gleam of red apples. Aleck saw them and asked what they were—for in his experience, apples grew on a stand before a store, or in boxes and barrels inside. Enlightened on this point, he immediately demanded some. Spud refused him.

"Why don't you get 'em for him?" de-

manded Shamanski, seeing a chance to make difficulty for his rival.

"They aint mine," said Spud, repeating in brief his explanation to Aleck.

"Who cares?" retorted the other lad. "That aint what's stoppin' you. You dassent!"

"I dast, too!"

"You dassent! You're a 'fraid-cat! You dassent!"

WESTERN authorities lay down the rule that it doesn't hurt to be called a horsethief unless you are one, but that if the gibe is true, it justifies any reprisals short of manslaughter. The same principle was at work here. Spud was afraid, and he suspected that the Gannertys knew it. Therefore he dared not ignore the challenge.

"I'll show you whether I dast or not!" he retorted, and moved off. Aleck followed. Spud ordered him back, gave up the point before the retarded boy's tearful protests, and with a sinking heart, set himself to carry out his boast. Young Shamanski chuckled hopefully.

Spud had noticed that the orchard was flanked by a cornfield whose tassels waved well above the head of a grown man, and that fact formed the basis of his simple strategy. Aleck trailing at his heels, he walked carelessly down the road away from the farmhouse till he believed himself out of sight, then crawled through the fence, and with his retainer, vanished into the thicket of corn.

Old slaves used to say that a cornfield provides a better hiding-place than the densest forest. Spud took a dozen steps into the green shade—and suddenly realized that he could not tell where he was going. He turned back—that is, he thought he did; but the fence did not appear. For a moment he was panic-stricken; then, happening to glance down, he saw his own footprint, and following them back, he came to the roadside.

"We're back where we come from," announced Aleck, to whom Spud had not confided his fears.

Impressed anew by the perils of his adventure, Spud took as careful observations as a city boy could. For the first time he noted that the corn was planted in hills, equal distances apart. The likeness of these to intersecting streets cheered him, and he started again. After walking what he thought a sufficient dis-

tance, he turned to the left, and cautiously made his way to the edge of the field. The house was in plain sight. Back into the green jungle he dived, and trudged on. At the third attempt he came out at the spot he had aimed for, under the hill, out of sight of the house. A little way inside the fence stood a tree with delicious-looking apples. Spud looked for guards, but could see none. He wriggled under the wires, made for the tree, and was filling his pockets with windfalls when he heard a sharp hissing sound, a furious bark, and a farm dog came charging like a hurricane. The farmer's son, about Spud's own age, had noticed the city lad's maneuver, and was lying in wait.

SPUDE raced for the cornfield, but stopped.

Aleck, his scanty wits gone glimmering, was running toward the pasture with the dog after him. The sight of his cousin's distress banished Spud's fears; he caught up a branch lying near, and, yelling furiously, charged to the rescue. Up to this time the dog had no thought of biting—though he put up a ferocious bluff; but Spud's attack roused him, and the lad had much ado to hold off the animal with the bushy end of the branch. The farmer's wife appeared near the barn and called to the dog, which turned back reluctantly. Spud dropped his weapon and dashed madly for the pasture fence; and Towser, seeing the enemy in flight, rushed again, and his teeth closed on a mouthful of cloth. There was a shriek, a snarl, a ripping sound, and the boy tumbled into the pasture, but the slack of his breeches remained behind with the dog.

Spud was crying a little as he reached this temporary haven. Aleck was bawling at the top of his excellent lungs. The farmer's son, behind them in the orchard, was calling jeers and insults, and the dog kept up a growling obligato. Spud explored by touch the yawning chasm in the rearward parts of his costume, and knew that he could not go back to the Gannertys. They would kid him to death. He had money—the Scotch strain was the dominant one in his mixed nature; he would find the interurban, wait till nightfall, when the deficiencies of his clothing would be less visible, and ride back that way. Across the pasture he could see a road, evidently not one of the main highways, which ought to lead them to the electric line.

"Come on, Aleck," he said. "We'll have a picnic by ourselves."

Aleck hushed his cries, and the two lads started across the pasture. The farmer's boy, grinning in happy anticipation, watched them through the fence.

THE cows were feeding some distance away and Spud gave them a wide berth. They paid no attention to him, but they had a more watchful companion. This was one of the few farms in the neighborhood of the great city which kept sheep, and at this season of the year the head of the flock was barred from his woolly harem, and ran with the cattle. The breeze brought the ram a strange scent, and he looked up resentfully, to see two small figures trudging across his domain. They looked helpless, and since sheep are much like men in some ways, this increased his resentment. He walked out toward them; the walk became a trot, the trot a run. He was within twenty feet before the city-deafened ears heard him. Then the boys turned, saw a woolly creature charging with lowered head, Aleck let out a bawl, and both leaped forward. The leap reduced the shock, but Aleck, the ram's immediate target, was knocked end-wise.

The retarded boy's cry this time was one of sheer, mad panic; and as it ended, there came, delayed by the distance, a shrill yelp of glee from the orchard fence. I think that yelp was all that kept Spud from yielding to his terror, for the moment, at least. His throat dry and his eyes glassy with fear, he charged. He had no weapon, but he fell upon the ram with fists and feet, and to his astonishment, the brute gave ground. Hardly daring to believe his senses, Spud turned to help his cousin, who already was scrambling up—and on the instant, the older boy was knocked sprawling. By the time he gained his feet, Aleck was down again, and the ram turned back to Spud. The latter ran, stumbled just as the creature was upon him, and twisting round as he fell, clutched a curling horn. All the time came the jeers from the orchard.

Boys are prone to cruelty, but the farmer's son was jeering less at misfortune than at what he deemed awkwardness. An active twelve-year-old boy who knows his job can conquer the strongest ram with ease. Once launched on the last phase of his charge, the brute can neither stop nor

turn, and at close quarters he is helpless. Therefore—I speak whereof I know—one need only wait, step aside at the final spring, and seize the creature by horns or wool. After that, the proper procedure depends on your size. If a grown-up, lead your captive away; he will come, though under protest. If a boy, get on his back and ride the fight out of him; it won't take long. He cannot throw you, and you are so close to the ground that a fall will not hurt, anyway.

Spud knew none of these things, but his blood was up, and as I have remarked before, a timid person is not always a coward. He grappled with the ram, and found him strangely easy to hold. The brute crowded and pushed and bleated, but could accomplish nothing. Holding tight, Spud began to back toward the fence, from the other side of which Aleck already was shouting vindictive advice. Several times the lad was pushed down, but this did not hurt him, and he retaliated by kicking the ram heavily. At last the pair reached the fence. Putting one hand back of him while the other still clutched a horn, Spud got hold of a post, put one foot in a loop of the woven wire; then released his prisoner and scrambled for dear life. By the time the ram had backed away for a charge, his target was safe in the roadway.

"Damn' ol' sheep!" said Aleck. He never had seen a sheep before, which proves the value of pictures in school-books. "You come over here, an' I'll kick your face in! Damn' ol' sheep! You fixed him, Spud!"

SPUD knew better, but his success in conducting a strategic retreat encouraged him. "We'll go this way," he said, turning to the left, that being away from the road by which the Gannertys had reached their present station.

"I'm hungry," said Aleck."

"You're always hungry," said Spud. But the habit of taking care of the smaller lad was strong, and he added, a little less ungraciously:

"We'll get some milk at that house."

As he spoke, he felt instinctively for his money, and stopped, gasping. It was gone. He felt again. He rummaged frantically among his clothes, with no results. In the right-hand pocket of his knickerbockers, safe under a much-used handkerchief, reposed sixteen cents; but the two paper dollars and forty cents in change on which

he had relied to get them back to the city, were gone.

THE boy was fairly stunned when the situation dawned on him. There was no trouble in understanding how the disaster occurred. The scrimmage with the dog and the long fight with the ram explained that; but even if he could face these ferocious creatures,—which he could not,—what chance was there of finding his treasure? None. It was lost; the seat of his trousers was lost likewise; and he would have to go back to the Gannertys in this guise and endure their gibes all through the homeward journey. There was nothing else to do. But even as he made the heartbreaking decision, he heard shrill yells from the direction of the main road. The trucks had started. Spud raced to the summit of the hillock from which he could see the highway. One truck was a hundred yards beyond the opening of the byroad already, the other swept past even as he screamed, but it was a quarter of a mile away, and one screech more or less counted for nothing in the chorus. The drivers, as said before, did not know their charges, and the boys themselves were too heedless to call the roll.

Spud dropped in the lane, sobbing in a way that would have melted the heart of an inquisitor. Aleck, grieved at the sorrow of his champion, came up and gave him a hug. "You fixed that damn' ol' sheep, Spud," he said, over and over again, as if that were a formula which could cure their troubles. After a time the older boy stopped crying, got up and looked around. The ram was keeping them company, just inside the pasture fence. Spud gathered some stones, rocked the brute with satisfying vigor for a few minutes, and then started eastward, no longer because he hoped to find the interurban, but because in that direction lay the city. He could see the pall of smoke from the hillock.

He explained the situation to Aleck as well as he could, which was not very well. "We'll have to walk, part of the way," said Spud. "But we'll get a ride with somebody goin' into town, I guess. Folks most always give kids a ride."

"I'm hungry," said Aleck.

He repeated this remark at short intervals as they marched eastward. Spud ignored, scolded, coaxed, threatened, to no purpose; and at last, giving in as the higher creature always does to the ele-

mental insistence of the lower, turned in at a farmhouse. A dog came to meet them, growling suspiciously, and the boys stopped. A heavy-set, fair-haired woman came out on the porch, and spoke:

"What you want?"

"Please, ma'am," said Spud, "can we get some milk?"

"You got money?" asked the blonde heavyweight. She pronounced the important word with a long "o."

"Yes'm, we got some," returned Spud.

"Haar, Rover," called the woman to the dog, who retired obediently. "How mooch you got?" she demanded.

"I got ten cents," said Spud. It is in disaster that Scotch blood shows its worth.

"All raight."

SHE walked to the milkhouse. A little girl appeared on the kitchen steps and watched them. Spud got out his dime, but held it tight till the woman filled a big tin cup, then handed over the precious coin with a sigh. Aleck drank deeply, and the cup was refilled for Spud. The milk had a strangely rich taste, which made him wonder if it were quite wholesome, but he was too thirsty to bother. The blonde woman gave them generous measure, though her face expressed no faintest tinge of friendliness. Spud had kept his rear view carefully turned away, but now the little girl, curious about these strange looking waifs, came up behind them and burst into shrill speech:

"O-o-o-o-o, Mamma! Lookit his pants!"

Spud blushed scarlet and dodged back, but Aleck was in the way, as usual. The woman caught him by the shoulder, turned him round, looked and gave a slow guffaw.

"You bane stealin'," she said. "You swipe apples, an' dog did that. You better git."

They got, Spud carrying the burden of insult as well as injury. A mile, two miles, they plodded cityward along the lonesome road. Not a car passed them going their way, and only two did they meet. Spud's apprehensions took a new turn.

Cities grow by throwing long tentacles out into the country along lines of transportation. Between these tentacles the countryside is spoiled, rather than developed. Spud and Aleck had hit one of these interspaces. The electric interurban, likewise the cement road, was a mile or more south. The nearest steam road that made any bid for suburban passenger

traffic was somewhat farther to the north. The region between was held in part by the original owners, in part by speculators waiting for a rise, and among them was a sprinkling of market gardens, and a few small industries. Two railroads devoted to freight passed through the strip, which in consequence was overrun by tramps. If the lads had sought for weeks, they could not have found a district where two strange boys had a poorer chance for a friendly welcome than the territory through which they were moving. It was beginner's luck—reversed.

Aleck began to complain of weariness, and Spud's feet were tired. They were not used to walking on an irregular surface. At last, two or three miles beyond the farm where they got the milk, they came to a thicket by the roadside, and Spud turned into it.

"Let's lie down an' rest a few minutes," he said.

WHEN he woke, it was dusk; the sun was gone, and through the red glow of the west a big star showed close to the horizon. Spud never had seen a star that near the ground before, but he was too startled to think about that. They must hurry, hurry, if they were to get to the city that night. Once in the presence of people of the hive, he would know what to do; a policeman would give him directions, lend him carfare, and he could get home. He roused his companion, and they started.

"I'm hungry," said Aleck.

"You can't eat till we get home," said Spud, knowing that the facts were on his side at last. "I haven't got any more money."

"Aleck hungry," was the answer.

They tramped on. From a low knoll they saw the glow of the city, oh, so far away. The dusk turned to darkness, and more stars came out—Spud never had seen so many stars. Two cars met them; one passed going at a furious pace which made their pleas useless. At last Spud took a sudden resolve. He saw a lantern moving between house and barn, and turned into the place, crossing a bridge over a deep ditch at the roadside. He would ask charity, seek a place to sleep and a bite to stay his cousin's cries, and resume the cityward march in the morning. It was not much to ask, and at nine places out of ten it would have brought ready succor—but this was the tenth place.

JOB KAPPER'S baptismal name was Augustus, but he earned the shorter title by his manifold troubles, as recited by himself. He was not crazy, in the ordinary sense of that term, but he was more than a little cracked. A bachelor of fifty, full of crotchets, with a furious temper which exploded on the slightest provocation yet seldom did any damage, he was the terror, the butt and the pity of the countryside. His special aversion was children, which was natural, considering the way the more active youngsters of the neighborhood taunted and teased him. He was a tireless worker, and now, when most of his neighbors were ready to go to bed, he was just coming in from the barn to get his lonely supper. He stopped in astonishment as two small figures came within range of his lantern.

"Vell?" he demanded. "Vot de hell you vant?"

"P-please, sir," said a frightened voice, "p-please, w-wont you l-let us stay here tonight? W-we're lost—"

"Vot?" yelled Job.

"W-we were on a picnic—" Spud started to explain; but he got no farther. Picnics! City rascals playing while hard-working farmers toiled early and late!

"Ged out!" he yelled with a furious wave of his arm.

"B-but, p-please—" began Spud. At the slightest sign of opposition, Kapper lost his head altogether. He did not keep a dog, but he sprang toward a wagon standing near, seized his horsewhip, and its lash curled around Spud's shoulders. The boys fled, and he pursued them as far as the road. The last cut of the whip was directed at Aleck. It stung his legs; he jerked away from the protecting clasp of his cousin and tumbled headlong into the deep roadside ditch.

He screamed as he hit the dry bottom, screamed again as Spud sprang down after him and caught him by the arm. Spud shifted his grip, dragged the smaller lad out somehow, and together they retreated down the road. Kapper had turned back, and the bushes hid his lantern. There was real pain back of Aleck's cries.

"What is it?" asked Spud.

"M-my arm!" wailed Aleck in a low tone.

His left arm hung limp, and the slightest touch upon it made him wince. Spud felt sure the limb was broken. He had received a little instruction in first aid, and

did his best to put the lessons in practice now. In spite of protests, he doubled the arm at the elbow, and with all the pins and handkerchiefs the two possessed, slung it up to take the weight from the shoulder and lessen the jar of walking. Then, encouraging the retarded lad very gently, Spud started on.

The lights of a modern city glared in the distance. The features of a modern though unprogressive countryside lay about. From the north came the whistle of a locomotive, and from the south, borne on the breeze, the squawk of a motorhorn. But in spite of these signs of civilization, two shrinking creatures of the ancient caves crept homeward through the darkness, counting every darker shadow a threat. Aleck's wails sunk to the soft whimper of the wild thing that dares not complain aloud lest it betray itself to its enemies; while Spud, almost as primitive in impulse but retaining some of his city-sharpened wits, helped his cousin along as some Cro-Magnon ancestor may have helped back a companion from a disastrous raid into the land of the Neanderthals.

It was clear to Spud that they could not walk far. It was equally clear that every man's hand was against them, and that there was no use in asking help. But there was a chance that he might steal the aid which had been refused to his pleadings. He led his wounded retainer along in silence, watching warily. At last he came to a house somewhat larger than most, and one which seemed more akin to the city. Lights burned in the upper windows, and on the driveway, headed toward the road, stood a car. Even in the dim light Spud noted with tingling nerves that it was a flivver, the only car he was familiar enough with to attempt to drive it.

"Wait here," he whispered, and for once Aleck obeyed without question. Spud reconnoitered carefully. There was no dog; at least, none came. And the car—oh, joy!—had a self-starter. Tiptoeing back to the road, Spud got Aleck, helped him into the rear seat, climbed to the driver's place, and started.

THE maker of flivvers has endowed them with many virtues, but silence is not included in the list. Dr. Somers, ready to leave his patient, heard the spluttering outcry of the machine, and looked out in time to see it turn into the road and head toward the city. The householder saw, too, and

being a deputy constable, he took instant action.

"Come on, Doctor, we'll catch 'em," he cried. His own machine, likewise a flivver, was behind the house; and in a minute the two men were in pursuit. Two minutes more showed that the thief, whoever he might be, was an uncertain driver; and little more than a mile from the starting-place the pursuers ranged up alongside. The Doctor leveled the constable's pistol at the shape huddled over the other wheel, and both cars ground to a stop. The deputy sprang out, took possession of his pistol, turned a flashlight on the stolen flivver and advanced to claim his prisoner.

"Why, it's a kid!" he exclaimed as Spud's forlorn figure showed in the light of the flash. "What do you mean by stealin' cars, young feller?" he demanded belligerently. "Climb down there!—Don't it beat hell the way kids are runnin' loose, these days?" he remarked in an aside to the Doctor.

SPUD climbed down at the word of command, and advanced till the lights of the stolen machine played upon him. His face was haggard with weariness and hunger, grimy with dirt and streaked with sweat; and his clothes were a ghastly ruin. He was caught, red-handed, in theft. But his sincerity and grim purpose gave him dignity.

"I did steal it," he said. "I had to. I don't want to keep it, but I've got to get Aleck home. The trucks left us, I lost my money, an' the man knocked him into the ditch an' broke his arm. I've got to get him back! P-lease, mister, don't stop me! I've got to go!"

"Well, I'll be—" began the deputy, but Dr. Somers silenced him with a gesture and stepped up to the pleading lad. "Where is Aleck?" he asked gently. Spud turned to the tonneau, Dr. Somers followed, and between them they brought a frightened, whimpering child to the light. The Doctor made a brief examination.

"Collar-bone," he said still more briefly. "Get my bag and bring that back cushion. Have you got to get home tonight, son? How do you come to be here?"

Spud told his story, simply and unemotionally. When he came to Kapper, the

deputy swore a bit under his breath and muttered that the authorities would have to lock that nut up before he killed some one. Dr. Somers spoke no word, save of direction to his patient and his helpers. The rear cushion, laid in the road, made a good operating table for the purpose in hand, and the headlights furnished illumination. When he had finished, the Doctor stood up, closing his bag.

"All right, he said. "Dan, you've got directions, and I'll drop in tomorrow. Come on, Aleck; come on, Spud; we're going home."

THE Gannertys had assembled for the first regular meeting since the summer recess. Spud was presiding—for the last time, he told himself, and there was a queer air of excitement in the gathering which he could not understand. It did not seem unfriendly excitement, but he supposed it would be when they came to his case.

"Unfinished business," he called, never realizing how crisp and authoritative his voice sounded.

Buck Gibson arose.

"Mr. President," he began, "Gents—I mean, gentlemen—I—er—the unfinished business before the meeting is—er—" He floundered desperately, and then dived at the subject head foremost. "It's this probation business," he said. "I move that Mr. Spud Gordon has made good an' be elected president—"

"Second the motion!" screeched a dozen voices in interruption. A partial silence followed the chorus, and Isidore Shamanski, climbing on his chair, gave the Gannertys a lesson in parliamentary procedure and made himself solid at the same time:

"I move that nominations be closed, an' the unanimous ballot of this club be cast for Mr. Gordon by the secretary. All in favor say 'Aye!'"

They were all in favor; you could have heard their approval a block away. Before Spud could get his breath, Buck Gibson was shaking his hand, not as a patron, but as an equal.

"You're there with bells on, kid," he said. "We've heard all about that trip home. This probation business is over. You're boss, now; treat 'em rough!"



Easy Street Experts

"Eagle-hawked" finds the Honorable John Brass and Colonel Clumber undertaking another interesting exploit in the subtle art of thieving from thieves.

By BERTRAM ATKEY

IT was while those genial though somewhat wolf-witted residents on Easy Street, Messieurs the Honorable John Brass and his partner Colonel Clumber, were returning from a wild-fowling trip to the East Coast that they first heard of Mr. Oswald Weye, M. P.

They had stopped, halfway home, to lunch at the White Hind Hotel, at Arm-borough, and were in the mood to take a deep interest in the happy gossip of the attractive landlady of the small hostelry.

The lady was one of those large but lightsome blondes with a merry eye, a breezy style, and probably a subdued husband kept somewhere in the kitchen or permitted to air his authority behind the bar of the taproom only, while Madam ran the more impressive part of the establishment. She took to the Honorable John and Colonel Clumber at once, and waited on them more or less with her own hands.

The food was plain but good, and the lady produced a couple of bottles of really excellent Madeira to encourage them in

the matter of dealing justly with the simple gravy soup, the chicken, and so forth, which formed the meal.

It appeared—at about the stage when the Honorable John produced cigars—that the Colonel was extraordinarily like Mr. Oswald Weye, the local Member of Parliament—though, stated the lady, she hoped that they were alike only in a certain appearance of distinction that characterized each. She hoped, she added with a gently frolicsome archness, she *hoped* that Clumber paid his bills more punctually than Mr. Weye. Here she sent for some liqueur brandy of which she claimed to be proud; and the Honorable John pricked up his ears.

"Weye, M. P.?" he said. "Why, that's the man behind this wonderful new light car that is just coming on to the market—the Eaglehawk, aint it?"

He frowned a little puzzled frown, removed it from his brow and suddenly became insistent that the buxom lady should be their guest to the extent of a liqueur.

She was excessively surprised at the invitation, for, it appeared, she never touched liqueurs—it was years since she had even thought of it; besides, there was the waiter to consider—it looked so—well, perhaps, since they weren't very busy, as it happened—and it was not often such—well, jolly—visitors came—just one—one little one. She sat down and they let her prattle for a pleasant half-hour.

IT was not until some time later after the jolly visitors had departed that, thinking of them, as women will of men who are obviously brighter than their own husbands, it occurred to her that the conversation had kept pretty steadily on Mr. Oswald Weye, M. P., and his bad habit of paying his bills so slowly—not a very interesting subject of conversation on the whole, even though the politician did owe her a very tolerable hotel-bill. It had not seemed to her at the time that she was being pinned down rather completely to that subject, but looking back at it—Here her husband dropped and smashed a tumbler in the tap, and—as is the way, at times, of these merry blondes—she went round to give the man some slight indication of what she really thought of him.

But however it may have been with the landlady of The White Hind, the Honorable John and his partner, lounging comfortably on the lavish upholstery of their limousine, in a haze of cigar-smoke that cost them at least sixpence a cubic foot, were still discussing Oswald.

"If you can tell me how the deuce this Parliamentary guy is hard up, I should be glad to listen while you do it," said the Honorable John.

"What if he is? Let him be hard up. We're all right; that's the main thing. Hang him—what does he matter?" replied the Colonel, saying frankly what he thought, and punctuating it with a yawn.

But the Honorable John's eye was bright and steely, and there was a look on his face that the drowsy Clumber knew of old. He sat up with an effort.

"Have you got some wildcat reverie about getting away with what little this Oswald lawgiver may have—his four hundred a year pay?" demanded the Colonel.

"I am no wildcat reverist," said the Honorable John tranquilly. "But I'll own that I don't see just how it is that the sole proprietor of the forthcoming Eaglehawk or the Hawk-eagle, or whatever it is,

which is going to sweep all other British light cars into the dustbin when it comes forth—can be too hard up to pay such a moderate bill as gay little Goldilocks back at the hotel told us he owed her. Why not try a little reverence yourself—hey, Squire? That's it—you take a whirl at the refereeing too, and we'll compare notes later."

They proceeded to "revery"—waking almost simultaneously as the big car swung into the drive of their secluded country-house retreat at Purdston, on the Surrey Hants border.

"Well, any ideas about Oswald?" asked the Honorable John rather quickly.

"Oswald? Oswald be damned!" said his partner politely. "Can't I have forty winks without getting a Member of Parliament flung in my face the minute I open my eyes?"

"Ah! Well, I have," said the Honorable John, lying in that quiet, solid way which he frequently found so effective.

"Will they keep?" asked the Colonel. "Because if they will, I'll trouble you to keep 'em till after dinner."

"I will," said the Honorable John with dignity—and did.

IN spite of the highly cavalier manner in which the Colonel saw fit to receive his partner's first few hints that the affairs of Mr. Weye might repay their careful attention, nevertheless he proved highly amenable to reason when presently the two old rascals retired from the table, having heavily defeated the goodly dinner which had awaited them, and settled down before the fire.

"What is all this stuff you were trying to pull on me about the Oswald guy?" asked the Colonel, quite good-humoredly for him, as he carefully cut the end off a big cigar.

"I'll tell you, Squire," said the Honorable John, and turned to that crocus-colored export from China, his valet, chauffeur, cook and all-around gentleman-in-waiting, Sing. "Just get me this morning's papers, Sing, my son. Look alive, my lad—put the brandy on the table—don't stand staring—don't stand staring!"

The Chink grinned, vanished, reappeared with newspapers and departed.

"Here we are," said the Honorable John, after glancing through one of the papers. "The Eaglehawk! An eleven-and-nineths horsepower two-seater for one hun-

dred and ninety-nine pounds—warranted the best little car on earth—whatever that means.” He pored over a big advertisement. “H’m! Delivery of the first thousand guaranteed in two months! By the end of the summer they expect to be turning out twenty thousand cars a year. Plant now being built—works seven acres—and so on. It isn’t a company, mark you, Squire. It’s a one-man shot—Oswald Weye, M. P., who is transforming the whole of the famous (so-called) truck and barrow works established by his grandfather in 1840 into a ‘vast machine’ for the production of the what he calls the plain man’s car! And that’s the man,” he concluded, dropping the newspaper, “who can’t pay a hotel bill run up in his own constituency!”

FOR many years there had existed between the two partners a curious form of rivalry which, although always kept very firmly in hand and subsidiary to their main interest, nevertheless afforded the pair of them a certain mild excitement and occasionally some amusement. The Honorable John had a passion for detail. The Colonel scorned and despised it. Nothing pleased the senior partner more than to pounce on some trivial little point and worry at it until it developed into something worth the serious attention of the combine. Nothing pleased the junior partner more than to mock the mental and physical labor of the Honorable John upon these minute points, though few could have forgotten all that and charged in with a more wolfy enthusiasm than the Colonel when, as was very frequently the case, his partner was proved once again to have justified his belief.

So it was in the matter of Mr. Oswald Weye. Colonel Clumber would not permit himself to be seriously bothered about it at first, but when a week or so after their lunch at The White Hand the Honorable John, rather mysteriously, invited him to take a run on Saturday afternoon, and he obligingly did so, he was given food for thought.

It was snowing lightly when, after lunch, the Honorable John proposed the drive, and for a moment the Colonel stared at him in disgusted amazement.

“You’ve sprained your sense of humor, haven’t you?” he demanded. “Look at what’s coming!” He indicated a vast leaden cloud that covered the whole sky.

“That’ll be all right,” said the Honorable John. “If that wasn’t well on the way to coming down, I shouldn’t be asking you to come for a run for which we look like getting paid at the rate of a hundred pounds or so a mile—perhaps more!”

“Hey?” said the surprised Colonel, and he got up. “That’s different! I don’t know what you’re laboring out—but I suppose I’ll have to come.”

The Honorable John sent for their butler-retainer Ferdinand Bloom, whose guilty conscience, thirsty nature, ingrained dislike for steady continuous labor, and well-founded fear of the revengeful nature of the Colonel (whom he had foolishly once tried to rob) kept him—with his wife, who acted as the partners’ housekeeper—at Purdston, busily butting when the partners were “in residence,” and idling when they were not.

“Bring our furs, Bloom, and do up some caviare, and smoked salmon sandwiches and bring the flasks. Tell Sing to have the car ready, and look alive, my man, look alive! Move yourself for once in a way! It’ll keep you warm, anyway!”

BLOOM left the room, and pausing only to shake both fists and to grate his teeth at the door, fell to forthwith. Half an hour later the partners were gliding smoothly across Surrey to Kent.

Save for the frequent furious yell of the electric horn, the low, soft, soporific hum of the transmission and the heavily muffled exhaust, they traveled silently. The snow was thickening, and it was impossible to see more than a few yards, though the condor-eyed Sing at the wheel seemed to have no difficulty in making a comfortable mileage.

They appeared to swing round the southeastern outskirts of London, and so presently were running down the south side of the Thames—a grisly region in that weather. The Colonel was becoming seriously restive when the car came softly to a standstill, and Sing slid out of his seat.

“Allee same place, master—we finish. You coming, please?”

“Sure, my son.”

Turning up his warm collar, the Honorable John stepped into the whirl of snowflakes, and his partner followed him.

“I suppose you know where you are—for I’m damned if I do,” he grumbled.

“That’ll be all right,” said the Honorable John Brass. “’Old my ’and!” he

added just a bit humorously. The Colonel snarled.

"You hang on here, Sing," commanded Brass. "Keep her ticking over in case we want to leave kind of crisp. Come on, Squire—this way."

THE partners vanished into the snow, and the Chink with one hungry, wistful stare after them,—he was, as the Honorable John said, "a whale for a little sport,"—climbed into his seat and proceeded to maneuver the car into the requisite position for making a "crisp" start, if necessary.

The partners, looking in the dense snow-fall extraordinarily like two big furry bears, made their way, Brass guiding, along a wall, for some distance. Then the Honorable John stopped, took a key from his overcoat pocket and opened silent negotiations with a small door in the wall. He understood locks better than many locksmiths, and almost immediately the door swung back.

"Follow me, Squire," he said, and together they passed through the doorway. The Honorable John closed the door carefully and led the way across a big barnlike building. Their snow-clogged feet fell with a dull softness. In the dying light the Colonel saw that the place was empty save for a few rolls of tinned iron in one corner. They came to the doorway of the building and looked out into a big snow-whitened central yard, shut in on all sides by similar buildings.

"See, Squire?" said the Honorable John. "It's Saturday afternoon—nobody about."

"See what?" snapped the Colonel. "The snow—or this collection of sheds? Sure, I see it. What are you driving at—what is this place?"

"This," said his partner impressively, "is the factory—the works—of Mr. Oswald Weye, M. P.—the gentleman who is going to flood England with cheap cars—cheap but good. If you'll look at his advertisement any day, you will see that he has guaranteed to turn out a thousand eleven-horse-power Eaglehawk cars in two months."

"Well, what about it?"

"Why, all those sheds are as near empty as makes no matter. There's a bit of rusty machinery here and there, and a mixed lot of old iron—enough to set up a marine-store dealer in a small way of business, but that's all. There isn't

enough real plant or material here to turn out one car a month, much less hundreds."

The Colonel stared.

"Well, perhaps he intends to import 'em and is keeping the place as a depot."

"Depot be damned!" responded the Honorable John. "He guarantees 'em to be English cars. No, Squire, the man's a plain deposit-snatcher; that's what. He doesn't intend to make or sell as much as a child's go-cart. Probably he's got to go bust—and means to get something on the strength of his M. P. before he busts. All he's after is the deposits from people who do their thinking with their eyes and check-book. England's crammed just now with people who know as much about motors as you do of Euclid—and that's nothing. But they all want cars, and as Oswald and his parliamentary pals are running the country on about four times too much currency naturally everybody's got the money to buy a car at such a figure as one hundred and ninety-nine pounds. Oswald has got wise to this, and he's been selling paper cars for paper money for the last month. Hundreds of people have sent him a fifty-pound deposit for quick delivery of the pretty little eleven-horse-power fake which he had built for the show, for the agents to inspect and for the pictures of his advertisements. I've been looking into the matter while you've been resting from your meals the last week or so—and I've got wise to Oswald. As near as I can work it out, he's due to bolt with his loot in about three weeks. The first car's due for delivery within a month."

The Honorable John ceased and studied his friend with a mild glare of triumph. The Colonel said nothing at all. It was only too evident that his partner had picked up a very promising trail indeed.

"You've got to hand it to me again, Squire," said Brass, chuckling. "I don't want to rub it in—I'm not that kind of a man—but at the same time it's just as well that one of us keeps his lamps trimmed!"

But the Colonel was in no humor to be facetious.

"All right," he said. "What you say goes. Some men have luck, some talent. What comes next? Are we going to stand here admiring the scenery till dark? Or are we going home to dinner? We shall be late, anyway."

"Hey? What's that? Late for dinner!"

ejaculated the Honorable John, swiftly consulting his watch. "Come on, then—let's get back. There's plenty of time to get Oswald's goat another day. We'll get straight home. If you weren't such a stubborn man to convince, it wouldn't have been necessary to drag you all this way and be late for dinner—and there's quails *en casserole*, too—favorite dish o' mine. Come on, Squire—no use standing about any longer."

They made their exit, and about fifteen seconds later were what the Honorable John described as "well away" for home.

(It may be mentioned here that he did not get his quails after all. Something had gone wrong in the quail department of the dinner. But he did some fine work with a dish of boned larks, stuffed with chicken force and braised; and what happened to some appalling expensive asparagus which Mr. Bloom had prepared *à la Milanaise*, or in other words, cooked in salt water, strewn with grated Parmesan cheese and butter and browned in a quick oven, only the kindly god of good digestion and the partners really know.)

NEXT day the campaign against Mr. Oswald Weye, M. P., was launched in grim earnest. Slow starter though the Colonel indisputably was, nothing could exceed the grim, indeed almost grisly, enthusiasm with which he clamped himself soul and body to the interesting little task of driving a wedge between Oswald and a portion of his "deposits" as big as they could possibly make it.

During the week in which, as the Honorable John unfeelingly had put it, the Colonel had done nothing except rest from his mealtime exertions, Mr. Brass had not been idle. He had acquired a good deal of information about Mr. Weye, and further had had what he described as a "lamp round the man's house." By the simple process of engineering a so-called accident outside Weye's private house when the sole proprietor of the merry little Eaglehawk was away, he had made the acquaintance of the lady who acted as private secretary and house-controller to Oswald—a widower. She was, Brass said, a very charming woman of about thirty, named Violette—Mrs. Violette Lanson-Karr, to be exact.

"H'm! Sounds good-looking—kind of dashing," said the Colonel.

The Honorable John nodded.

"She is. Violette is a woman with her eyes open, and her mind doesn't leak. I like her. So will you. She's wise—and beautiful. She's no flapper, of course, naturally; but then, she's no fool. We'll drop in and see her this afternoon. Weye's place is only a thirty-five-mile run."

The Colonel agreed very readily.

"I suppose you've got to know her very well this last week?" he said rather enviously.

"Well, we're friends—Violette and I," admitted the Honorable John complacently.

"Humph!" went the Colonel, and turned to swear at Bloom for no apparent reason.

The car came round, and they departed.

"Married?" said the Colonel suddenly.

"Married? What d'ye mean, Colonel?" asked the Honorable John, who was scrutinizing a cigar.

"Violette, of course."

"I think so—I fancy she married one of those gentlemen whose sole means of existence is pigeon-shooting. They quarreled at Monaco on the honeymoon some years ago—he wanted to put her engagement ring on black to get back a little ready money, or something of the kind—and they parted enthusiastically for good. She's been secretary to Weye for five years. You'll like her—dark, lissome sort of woman—fine figure—clinging kind of manner," continued the Honorable John. "Got purple eyes—tender way with her. Invites confidence—you want to look out for that, she's the sort of woman who can strain your soul through a net and get all your secrets in the trawl while you're just wondering whether that curl over her ear is her own."

He lighted his cigar and laughed.

"But that'll be all right," he said. "I won't let you come to any harm."

The Colonel gave a hard smile.

"No—you won't. You're one of those unimpressible woman-haters. I've noticed that about you before. Man alive, if it hadn't been for me keeping a look out for you, you'd have been matrimonially lost to the world years ago!" concluded the Colonel in a sudden burst of candor.

The Honorable John Brass looked a shade uneasy.

"Oh, well, maybe—maybe. I've got a heart as big as an elephant's, and I know it," he admitted.

"So have you," he added. "Mind Violette Lanson-Karr don't get a lien on it."

She's some lily-handed octopus, believe me!"

He spoke the truth there.

"I TOLD my friend Colonel Clumber that you were looking pale," he was saying to the lissome lady a little later, "and he insisted on motoring over to take you for a run."

"That is the kindest thought!" she exclaimed. "But then I knew you were kind—you look kind, both of you."

"That's right," said the Honorable John. "We are kind—at least, we try to be—kind to our friends!"

Violette laughed.

"But you should be kind to your enemies too," she said playfully.

"Well, if we had any, we'd give it our consideration."

"But we haven't got any," said the Colonel.

They took her for a run in their touring car. It was frosty, and she enjoyed it enormously, but nevertheless the skillful questioning of the partners seemed to extract nothing of value from her conversation that could be considered a clue, as it were, to where Mr. Weyne had salted down the Eaglehawk loot.

They talked it over on the way home.

"What we want to find out is whether Oswald is going to some foreign country when he hops it, or whether he's going to ground in England," said the Honorable John. "And is he taking Violette with him or not? If not, I fancy she'll have a claw out for him, too. Did you notice anything in her pretty purple-eyed prattle that gave a hint?"

The Colonel shook his head.

"No," he confessed. "I was too busy keeping my soul out of her net. She's got the best-shaped mouth I remember seeing for some time."

"Yes, and she knows how to keep it shut," said Brass, frowning. "I got on to one point—a small point, but maybe useful. She said she hadn't been to London for two months—it sort of slipped out, and it sounded true. Now, if that's true, it means she hasn't bought any foreign outfit—she lives too near London to do a thing like that by post. Well, if she hasn't bought an outfit, it means that either she isn't going away with Oswald, or if she is, that they're going somewhere where a foreign outfit isn't required. That might be Paris, where she'll buy what she

needs, or somewhere in England. Hey, Squire?"

The Colonel nodded.

"You may be right," he said. "And you may be wrong. Probably you're wrong. It seems rough to hound that poor little dame down, this way."

"I'm not hounding *her*—she's a peach; it's Oswald's tainted money I want to hound. I wouldn't hound down a little dame like Violette under any consideration. But these Eaglehawk gazaloons are in another class," explained the Honorable John patiently, and continued his ingenious deductions.

"Well, suppose we put it that Oswald's going to earth at some quiet little place in England, and will be taking his secretary with him. I would, if she were my secretary. After all, I suppose the man will have some correspondence or something for her to do. Very well, that means disguises for both of 'em. Did you happen to spot anything in that line today?"

"Nothing to speak of," said the Colonel with heavy sarcasm. "I had an idea that there might be a wig inside the piano and a pair of Pierrot's trousers under the settee, but I never got a chance to prove it!"

"Ah, well—I fancy I did," said the Honorable John with a very complacent smile. "It's just as well that one of this firm keeps his presence of mind when calling on these purple-eyed, pretty-figured private secretaries!" He drew from his pocket an envelope which he flashed before his partner's eyes, so that he could see the name of the theatrical costumer which was printed at the back.

"I lifted it out of the letter-box under her very eyes, God bless her," he said, and ripped it open.

The Colonel stared, gave that peculiar half-heave, half-shrug which was with him a sign of surrender, and made his *amende*.

"If you had served your country as well as you have served yourself, you would have been Prime Minister by now," he said, apparently with some hazy idea that he was quoting the late Cardinal Wolsey. "You are a master crook, and if anything comes of this, I'll be damned if I don't buy you a blackjack for your collection! I'm glad that I don't owe you any money, and I'm proud to be your partner."

The Honorable John grinned with pleasure, for it was but rarely that the Colonel

was pleased to "praise" him. A hobby of his was collecting ancient winecups—the kind called "blackjacks."

"Thank'ee, Squire—there's a very fine little jack at an antique place in Bond Street. I'll guide you to it when we go to town. This"—he passed the theatrical costumer's bill—"is only an 'account rendered' with no details, but unless Oswald and Violette have been going to fancy-dress balls lately, it'll serve as a kind of hint. They're going disguised. Now, what we've got to do is to find out where Oswald has dug his dugout, and I'll tell you how we'll do it, Squire."

And he did—with the result that an hour after their return to Purdston, that durable ever-ready Sing, the Chink, was called upon to appear before his owner.

"It's time the motorcycle had a bit of exercise, Sing, my lad," said Brass. "Hey?"

"Yes, master—allee same doing nothing velly long time," grinned the expectant Chink happily.

"That's right, my son—can't have a thundering, great nine-horse skid-grid eating its head off like this. Take it out, Sing, ride to the place where we called this afternoon and hang about there, watching Mr. Oswald Weye and his secretary. Put up at the local pub' or somewhere. I shouldn't be surprised if one of these nights you'll find 'em do a journey by car somewhere. If they do—follow 'em—over a cliff, if necessary. Find out where they go—mind they don't disguise themselves and slip you—and then report back here quick. If they go by train, go with 'em—if you can. If not, telegraph me, and we'll meet you at their house. D'ye understand? All right. Here's twenty pounds. Don't spend it for the sake of spending—it's a bad habit, my lad, but don't be foolishly careful about it. . . . Now, you've got all that, lad—die, haven't you?"

"Yes, master, me velly much have got."

"Then slip it, my son."

Sing grinned and slipped it forthwith.

AMONG the various little "gifts" which the Honorable John undoubtedly possessed was a gift for what he called "timing" a crook. One listening to him holding forth on the subject when in the mood, and provided the Colonel was willing to be audience, might almost have believed that a "crook" was some kind of magneto.

Be that as it may, certainly the Honorable John Brass had succeeded in timing Mr. Oswald Weye, M. P., to a fraction of a millimeter—as Sing swiftly proved when three days later he returned, having put both himself and the "nine-horse skid-grid" through a grueling that left both somewhat shaken up.

The Chink had clung to the politician and his lissome secretary as the trailing seaweed clings to the hull of a ship too long at sea—tenacious and unseen. The night after he had left Purdston, a car had arrived at Weye's house just after dark, and the couple—their appearance greatly changed—had traveled to a retired little country place called Groundall, near Winchester, where they had stayed two days. Sing had extracted enough information from the local gossips to make quite clear to the Honorable John the Weye plan—which was, as he explained to his partner, so simple that, had it not been for him, the Honorable John Brass, it would probably have succeeded.

"Yes, we've got Oswald's goat, Squire," said he. "And if we aren't richer before long by a big double-handful of Oswald's Eaglehawk deposits, you can call me no hawk-eagle!" And so he proceeded to complete the laying out of his traps.

IT was exactly a week later when the partners received two telegrams—one from Sing, who was stationed at Rixley Heath, where Weye lived, warning them, in a cryptic message, that Mr. Oswald Weye and secretary were leaving that place for good that afternoon—and one from Bloom, stationed at Groundall, stating that from information received Mr. and Mrs. Everest were expected there that night.

"Good," said Brass. "They'll have the loot in cash with them, if I'm not making a mistake."

He glanced at his watch.

"We'd better be moving," he said with a reluctant sigh as he gazed round the comfortable room.

Their preparations were soon made, and within a quarter of an hour they were away—in the fast touring car, the Honorable John at the wheel.

It was dark when they stopped at Groundall and called at the Station Hotel for Bloom. Unfortunately they found Ferdinand very ill. The landlord—a lean and hungry-looking man, with a queer,

contemptuous, irritable style of drinking whisky—said that Bloom had been as sober as an undertaker 'until he went up to the post office in the early afternoon to send a telegram to some friends. But immediately after, he had bought a bottle of "this under-proof brandy" and went to his bedroom, saying that he had just successfully concluded five days of very hard work, and that he felt a little off color. He had left instructions to be called at five P. M. sharp. The landlord had called him personally, sharp to the minute—but he had found him very unwell—very unwell indeed."

The Honorable John interrupted.

"Forget the unwilling part of it, host," he said, "and, as man to man, tell me: was he sober or was he blind?"

The landlord irritably emptied his glass and looked the Honorable John squarely in the eye.

"He was as blind as a petrified, paralytic newt, gentlemen!" he said. "He didn't care if it snowed pyramids—that's how he was! And good luck to him, I say! He hasn't slept more than three hours a day since he's been here. Tramping the country all night—insomnia he called it. But he aint got insomnia now—the man's sleeping like old *Rip Van Winkle* himself!"

THE partners understood. It was a weakness of Ferdinand Bloom's. In his case (he claimed), any intense and prolonged application of his mind to any given subject invariably set up a most irritating and painful parching of the epiglottis, which could only be allayed by the passing over the parched part of a steady trickle of moisture—not more than thirty under proof, less if possible. In short, Bloom was out of action for the next twelve hours.

Oathfully the partners realized this, and fell to work to receive the expected fleeing couple without the aid of Mr. Bloom. They motored out to the house at which the proprietor of the visionary Eaglehawk and the purple-irised, lily-handed lady who was his wife or secretary or both—or neither—were liable to arrive at any moment, and following their favorite tactics, left their car just inside a grass-field adjoining the house, nose pointing to the road ready for a quick departure if necessary. Then they took up a position in an old, dank summer-house which faced the

house across a small tree-inclosed lawn, and settled down to wait.

"They may be here any minute, Squire," said the Honorable John. "We'll let 'em get indoors and get their things off, then we'll nip in on the old detective dodge and arrest 'em, take charge of the evidence—it'll run to thousands, I hope—then let 'em escape by accident. It's easy—robbing a little child of its bun would be a tough job compared with it. I'm sorry for Violette—but after all, money is money, whereas love is only love."

"Yes—love is," muttered the Colonel cryptically.

THE minutes stole by; finally their victims arrived.

The partners saw the lights of rather a noisy car swim to a standstill at the front door of the house. A woman got down and opened the door of a coach-house; the car was run in; and the woman returned to the house. A light appeared at one of the windows, and shortly afterward a man's figure passed before that window on the way to the door, which a moment later was shut with a slam.

"They're both in now—in the blank mousetrap," hissed the Honorable John. "Did you spot the big kit-bag he was carrying? It was so heavy it sagged him over sideways. I'll risk a big bet it was mostly notes in that bag. Notes, Squire! Notes! Get wise to that! We'll give 'em five minutes to get comfortable, and then we'll come down on 'em like Sir Ryan's wolf on the fold!"

They held each other back for five minutes, then "went to it"—to quote the Honorable John as he executed a species of shadow-dance across the lawn.

There was no reply to their carefully modest knocking at the door, so the Honorable John quietly applied a wire key and a little skill to the lock, and entered the house. They went straight to the room of the lighted window, and the Honorable John, looking very hard and official indeed, with a carefully prepared warrant well to fore, strode in, remarking as he did so:

"You're arrested, Oswa—"

He did not conclude the observation, for the room was empty—totally empty and unfurnished, except for an old portmanteau stood on end in the middle of the room. On the top of the portmanteau was an evil-smelling bicycle lamp placed

so that it shone full on the drawn blind of the window.

That was all.

The partners stared, literally "dumfounded" as the Honorable John subsequently described it.

"Search the house," snapped the Honorable John. They did so—it took them three minutes, for it was a small house, and every room was absolutely bare.

"A false scent!" said John. "They are miles away by now!"

"Then they've left their car," snapped the Colonel. "I'll swear *that's* still here."

They hastened to the coach-house. It was unlocked. The Colonel was right. The car was still there—an ancient taxicab long overdue for the scrap heap.

"Well, are you satisfied?" inquired the Colonel sourly. "Or would you like to run round and round the house doing some more eagle-hawking for a little while?"

The Honorable John raised his hand, smiling a forced smile.

"We've been double-crossed this time," he said. "I own it—I admit it. The best of men make mistakes sometimes—I do myself. This is one of 'em. Bloom has made a fool of himself some way—"

"No, not Bloom. Somebody's made a fool of somebody—but it aint Bloom," said the Colonel.

"Who is it, then?" demanded his partner.

"Why, the purple-eyed fondling—she's made a fool of you."

"And how about you?"

"Well, yes—you can write me down as an also-ran in the Tom Fool stakes, too! . . . Oh, come on, let's get home."

THEY banged the door of the coach-house with singular fury and headed for their car.

"What about Bloom? He's probably bust. Shall we give him a lift?" said the Honorable John as they turned into the field.

"No! Let the brandy-drinking black-guard walk home—do him a world of goo—hello! Where's the car?"

Where indeed?

The Honorable John took out his electric torch and rather aimlessly waved it about.

"She's gone! Oswald's got her. . . . It was Violette's favorite make—I remember her saying so. They knew all about us, somehow—been watching us, no doubt

—probably *she* did it. They went into the house at the front, straight through, out at the back, circled round the trees to our car—and away they go—like that! See? See that?" He flashed the light on the ground, showing a small deep indentation in the ground, soft from the thaw.

"See what?" growled the Colonel. "A worm?"

"No—that mark. It's the mark of a woman's heel. A Cuban heel. *She* wore Cuban heels."

"How d'you know?"

"I—happened to notice 'em one day."

Reluctantly they left the field.

"Well, what are we going to do about it? Take the taxi?"

The Honorable John looked at his watch.

"Not me, Squire. I don't want what teeth I have got left jarred out of my head. There'll be a train."

They started on the two-mile tramp to the station.

"What about the car?" asked the Colonel.

Brass reflected. Then, briefly, he spoke.

"You can search me, Squire! She's gone—for good, if I know anything about politicians and purple-eyed squaws. We can get another just as good for—a couple of thousand pounds. Oh, blazes! It'll hurt doing it—but I guess it'll be cheaper than matching up against Violette again. She's a flyer from Flyburg, is that girl. And my vote goes into the box against asking for more trouble with her. I don't pretend to understand dames—but I guess I know enough to keep from attempting to pull a stinging lizard back that's trying to get away from me!"

"What *are* you going to do, then?" snarled his partner.

The Honorable John stopped. "I'll tell you, Squire. I'm going to pass it off with a laugh!" he bawled furiously.

"Go on, then," yelled the Colonel. "*Laugh!*"

And the Honorable John laughed—laughed like a bearcat in a trap. For a moment his half-hysterical mirth echoed through the darkness, then ceased abruptly.

"And that's that—and be damned to it!" he said briskly. Then he slipped his arm through that of his partner and, their hearts too full for further conversation together, they pressed steadily on to the station.



L a n k y B o b

THE dust rose in an eddying cloud from the loading-pens at the siding. The steers milled and raked each other's flanks with the irritable action of all males that are uncomfortable and see no way of escape from the discomfort. The row of railbirds ornamenting the fence swore, whittled, damned the jostling cattle, and everything else in sight, rolled paper pipes and waited for the stock-cars to be set. The foreman came strolling over from the chuck-wagon.

"Red, sift over an' notify the old man them cars has came. Bill, do a bit of whittlin' that's worth while an' git that big splinter off'm the nigh rail of the chute. It might snag a steer."

He gave his orders in a conversational tone and lounged against the fence, picking his teeth with a knife. He felt peaceful after a session with Quong's grub.

"Goin' to make a flyin' switch with them four cars," said Boomer Purdy. "Them cars on the main line is goin' to git shook up, when all them loaded boxes meets up with 'em. High-Pocket John is hot."

The string of heavy freight-cars rattled past the switch, with a "shack" twisting hard on a brake-wheel and cursing the engineer. With a heavy crash it bumped the standing line. The stock-cars rolled up the inclined spur and were braked to a stand-

still. The brakeman on the last one ran lightly down the steps and dropped to the ground.

"Cut out the oratory, Jim, and come down here," he called to his mate.

"That's all right about oratory, but I wish John had to swing on a wheel two—three times when a string is shot over that way," he growled.

Armed with stout oak cudgels, the two brakemen joined in a hunt after tramp passengers, ready for trouble at sight. They went from car to car, looking inside and underneath. At the fourth one of the cars that had stood there overnight a brakeman yipped to his fellow, put his hands on the floor of the car and vaulted up.

"**T**HERE comes the ol' man," said Bill to the foreman.

"Hi-yi, cowboys! Git a move on ye!" said Foreman Jack Kling. "We gotta hustle them steers. Haze 'em along!"

His slouching laziness of attitude dropped off like a cloak, and he turned into a bundle of dynamic energy. Splintershin Jake let go a yell that had nothing to do with loading steers. Every puncher forgot cattle and craned his neck to see what was agitating Jake. Up the road a piece, old Tom Travis, owner of the Double T ranch



A Complete Novelette by E. E. HARRIMAN

and brand, started into the awkward run of a rider set afoot.

Out of the car the shack had entered came a racket of blows and oaths, shuffling feet and stamping heels. A tramp shot out of the door in a long leap that carried him well past the other brakeman. A cudgel-blow from the ambushed shack missed its mark. The tramp caught his balance, half turned and dodged a second blow, made with such vim and venom that the club flew out of the hand that held it. Instantly the tramp jumped for the club-wielder.

"Even Stephen now, damn you!" he said, and shot home a left punch.

It found its mark, and the brakeman staggered. In a flash he was set and dashed in. The pair met with a smash, nearly even in height and reach, but the railroad man well fed, fresh and husky, while the tramp appeared half-starved and gaunt.

Foreman Jack Kling stood by the fence watching with his men. A few minutes delay amounted to nothing when there was a good fight on. The boss was a good old sport and liked to see a mill as well as the next one. Wasn't he running his best to get there and not miss any of the show? Let the boys have their fun.

The brakeman who had chased the

tramp out of the car, leaped to the ground and glanced toward the engine. The engineer was half out of his window; the fireman hung out of the gangway at full-arm length, and the conductor was watching from the bottom step.

Tom Travis loped past the pens and joined Kling, Red teetering along at his side. The punchers on the far side of the pens climbed around to better points of vantage.

THE second brakeman ran to aid his mate, swinging his club for a clip at the unprotected back of the tramp. A yell from Red warned the tramp, and he leaped aside, clear of both his assailants, then in again at the one he had been fighting.

The other shack raised his club for another whack, and it jumped sideways, almost leaving his hand. He shifted it to his left and shook numbed fingers, as Jack Kling strode over and plucked it out of his hand. A bullet-mark showed raggedly near the center of the cudgel, and Jack carried a smoking six-gun in his hand.

"We aint very partickler round here, but we draws the line on two men jumpin' one an' usin' clubs. Stand still an' keep out o' this, er I may take an ear next crack," he remarked.

"Right you are, Jack!" yelled Travis.

"If that thar infernal fool don't play fair, we'll brand 'im. Fair fight, say I, an' let him tie into the bo later if he wants to."

The tramp seemed too lank to be anything but hungry; yet he stood his man off beautifully, cool and scientific in every move. His left jabs were welding the features of the shack into a gory mess. His foot-work was keeping him fairly free from damage, and it was plain that he was playing for a finale that would be punishing.

The brakeman was raging, and he rushed like a bull, growing wilder at every repulse. Now and then he landed, but almost invariably on a body that was going away from him, rendering his blows ineffective. Every time this happened,* a cyclone seemed to hit him, wherein arms and hard, bony fists seemed to come from all directions at once.

Presently the rushing tactics of the shack grew slower. He was tiring and losing his wind. A look of joy, fierce and uncompromising joy, came into the blue-gray eyes of the tramp, and he stepped in.

OUT of a whirlwind play of fists came the body of the shack, out and up, lifted by an uppercut beneath the chin. Down into the dusty weeds beside the track he dropped, flat and full length from a level turn. Not a muscle moved. He was out, and out for a long, long dream.

"Now, then, you danged coyote," said Jack Kling to the other shack, "this yere bo gits a chanst to breathe an' rest, an' then you can tie into him if ye like. He gives the word when he's ready, though."

"Let him come as fast as he likes," said the tramp. "I can lick cowards singly, in pairs or in droves, and nobody but a coward ever tries to use a club on a man when he is fighting another one."

They turned the brakeman loose, and he jumped in, determined to even up matters in payment for the knockout his mate had received. The hobo stood up to him and went in with double the fierceness he had shown in the first fight. That attempted blow from behind when he was busy had nettled him.

He cut the fellow's face into ribbons, blacked both his eyes, took out two front teeth, split his lip and mashed his nose, after giving him body blows that crumpled him up. Then he calmly knocked him out.

The punchers ki-yied and warwhooped around the gladiator in wild delight, all

trying to shake his hand at once. They clapped him on the back and swore that he was a man after their own hearts. Travis broke in on the jubilations sharply.

"Boys, that thar conductor is gittin' anxious. Load his pair o' deuces fer 'im. They're beginnin' to know mornin' has came."

SWIFTLY the pair of shacks, just enough awake to roll on elbows and blink groggily, were picked up and thrown into the car from which they had chased the hobo. Jack Kling waved a signal to the engineer and conductor; the engine coughed, snorted and rolled out. The gang turned to the job of loading steers, shouting last words of praise to the hobo, who grinned at them as they passed.

"Boys," he said, "I appreciate your kindness, but I would rather sit down to a square meal than win the Croix de Guerre just now."

"Dad!" called a clear young voice across the loading pens. "Dad, you send that man around to the chuck-wagon, this minute. You hear me?"

Everybody turned, to look, and the punchers grinned, winking at each other. The boss of their boss had spoken. Mandy Lee Travis, twenty-one, brown-eyed, brown-skinned, brown-clad,* alert, vivacious and exceedingly easy to look at, stood on the middle rail of the farther fence.

"Now, Mandy Lee, you been watchin' another fight, haint ye?" said Tom Travis. "Ye oughtta be 'shamed! Go long away, now!"

"'Course I have! Who wouldn't want to watch a man lick two things like those brakemen? Are you going to send that man over here or not?"

"Yes, yes, only run along away from yere. Loading-pens haint no place fer no decent gal to loaf round, nohow. Mr. Man, you jest hike along to my chuck-wagon an' let Quong See fill ye up. I reckon that danged old pirate kin do it, if ye haint too holler. Bein' as he loves a scrapper more'n he does his Joss an' he's been watchin' ye fight, I reckon he'll do his damndest. Git busy, boys!"

Over at the chuck-wagon the face of Quong had been pulled into knots of anxious interest when superior numbers threatened the hobo. The knots had untied and smoothed out when the first shack went out. When his mate started on the

road to dreamland, Quong had begun an ancient Chinese chant of victory.

One-eyed, scarred and battered, old Quong had been a warrior among warriors. His warrior soul had thrilled, and his muscles had tightened with every punch delivered. Now he glanced at Mandy Lee, hurrying to the wagon, and he ceased his chant.

"You Quong!" ordered Mandy Lee, coming up with the lank hobo following. "Plenty steak, plenty bread, allee samee boss boy."

"All light!" said the wrinkled old image, bestirring himself. "Him good."

The sound of his labors came floating out, the clank of stove-doors, the stirring of coals and the whack of a cleaver mingled with a pidgin rendition of: "Oh, bury me not on the lone prairie-eel!"

THE slap of a steak on hot iron followed a falsetto screech of "lone plailee-ee," and Mandy turned to face her unexpected guest.

"You are safe, stranger," she said twinkling about the eyes. "If you can stand it to wait while that steak fries, old Quong will fill you clear up to your Adam's apple. When he tries to sing, he is sure pleased over something. That means good eats for the hungry."

"I can wait," said the hobo. "I have had to put my stomach under subjection to circumstances, and it is well trained in waiting. The interval can be used to advantage in cleaning up."

"There is a basin, water and soap on that bench. I will throw out a towel," said Mandy Lee. "I see Quong has gathered up the others. You sure did hand it to those shacks right. I was mad enough to hop in and take a hand myself, when I saw that one try to bang you with a club while you were fighting his mate."

"That is part of what they are paid to do," said the hobo. "I had to trim them for doing it, but the account is squared. Let's forget them."

He turned to the basin and scrubbed himself, using the soap lavishly. Then he brought out a comb and smoothed his hair in presentable style, showing much skill in parting it without a mirror. He was ready when Quong slid a huge steak on the enameled plate and grinned at him. He had spread a clean flour-sack on the tail gate of the wagon and laid out the tools.

"*Suee la!*" intoned the Chinaman, reaching for the coffee pot.

"I don't know what that means, but I can guess," said the hobo.

"It means go ahead," translated Mandy. "Quong can talk our way right enough, but he likes to throw in something in his own lingo. It's his way of showing his independence. He wants folks to understand that he isn't a mite ashamed of being a Chink."

"Say, you mustn't stand there and look at me. Get busy with that grub! The steak will get cold. Eat it while it is hot. I will go away if you are too bashful to eat with me watching you."

"Don't! I'm bashful, all right, but not that bad," said he, his eyes twinkling. "I simply found the scenery too attractive to lose."

A rush of hot blood turned Mandy's brown skin to a dull brick red. Her temper rose at finding herself blushing, after all these years of matching wits with a mess of punchers. She had thought herself hardened to such things as compliments and criticisms.

"Well, the scenery in front of me lacks a good deal of paralyzing me with its beauty," she snapped. "A brushfire would improve it."

The hobo laid down his knife and rubbed a hand over his cheeks. It was his turn to grow apoplectic.

"Guess you're right, miss," he acknowledged. "Never needed a shave so much since I first used a razor. I wonder if I could borrow one from some puncher."

"Eat your grub. I'll take care of the razor question," she promised.

She turned to Quong and spoke. The old cook nodded, grinned and jabbered pidgin.

"Can do. Makee him fine, allee samee China boy, plenty quick!"

"There! It is all fixed. Eat your grub, and then Quong will cut your hair and shave you. He acts as barber for the bunch, part of the time."

"Hm! Would you mind standing by with a gun, in case he takes a notion to abbreviate me by a head? I don't like to appear suspicious, but our highbinder friend appears capable of cutting more than hair."

"Oh, he wont hurt you," Mandy hastened to explain. "He likes you."

Again she caught a twinkle in the eye of the hobo and blushed. How was it

CHAPTER II

that this unshaven, soiled and ragged knight of the road could lead her into pitfalls so easily, when she was a match for any puncher?

"Can the comedy! You are only trying to get a rise out of me," she declared. "I'll tell you, though, that Quong See can scrap. He keeps a pair of forty-fives and can throw them with any puncher in Arizona. He has a long knife that you could shave with without starting tears, and he keeps a sawed-off shotgun under his bed."

"Wow!" whistled the hobo. "I was right! King of the pirates! It behooves me to stand well with him if I stay here."

"Are you looking for a job?"

"Yes. I have been for all of six minutes. Any show for one?"

He looked at Mandy Lee, well aware by what he had seen and heard that her vote carried weight with Tom Travis.

"My name is Bob—surname does not count; and I do want a job here, no matter how much my looks deny it. I have made a muddle of life so far, and perhaps Arizona will help me get up again. Any chance for a green hand, if he is willing and strong?"

"Sure thing! Dad was wishing for another hand this very morning. I'll take you down to the pens and introduce you as the man he wanted."

"I'm as good as hired," said Hobo Bob, attacking the food again.

HE finished eating and submitted himself to the skilled hands of Quong. Deftly, gently, the cook shaved him with a razor that carried a perfect edge. Carefully he trimmed his overlong hair. Bob washed and dried his face, combed his hair once more and looked at Mandy Lee.

"Better—much better!" said she.

"Dad," said Mandy Lee, when she led the erstwhile hobo down to the loading-pens after his barbering, "you said this morning that you wanted another man right now. Here he is, ready for work. His name is Bob. Set him to work."

She turned and trotted back to the wagon, knowing that Bob's fate was settled. Old Tom opened his mouth two or three times, weakly, then he turned to Bob.

"Git in an' help Bill," he ordered, waving a hand to show who Bill might be. The punchers winked and chuckled. It always did tickle them to see Mandy Lee boss her father.

BOB climbed the side of the chute opposite Bill and began to poke the reluctant brutes along. He had received from Jack a short stick with a sharp point at one end. He kept one eye on Bill to learn his way of handling the job. In two minutes he had mastered the *modus operandi* and straightway forgot Bill.

When the last bawling, wild-eyed steer had been harried along into the car and the door closed behind its fear-stiffened tail, Bob came down from the chute and faced Kling, waiting for orders.

"Git out an' look them car-couplings over," ordered Jack. "Have to be sure them cars is coupled up right, er that there engineer will pull out some an' then bunt hell out'n the rest when he has to back up. It sure riles them fellers when a couplin' don't hold."

Bob hurried out to the line of cars that had been filled and eased down the inclined track to make room for the next. He tried every one of the twelve, to make sure of the couplings, then returned.

"All right, Bob! Kin ye ride a hoss?" asked Jack.

"A gentle one," said Bob. "I never backed a buckner. I reckon a good one would push my spine up through my hat in two minutes."

"Never mind. You'll learn," grinned Jack. "Git the extry saddle out'n the wagon an' saddle the pinto with the Roman nose."

Bob got the saddle and cinched it on the pinto, taking especial pains to have the blanket smooth. The latigo-strap bothered him for a moment, and he walked over to a saddled horse, took one good look and came back. He ran the latigo through the rings, pulled it tight and made it fast. Jack strolled over to his side.

"Haint ye never seen a cinch with a latigo afore?" he asked.

"No—nothing but buckles."

"You ketched on mighty quick about the way it's worked," said Jack examining the latigo fastening. "I'd take it up a bit, though. Ye got to cinch a hoss plenty tight fer rough travelin', er he'll leave ye setting in yer saddle some place along the trail."

Deftly he caught his fingers under the strap and tightened it till he had more than a foot of extra leather hanging free.

"A old stager at this yer game swells

his sides out, so the cinch will set slack when a feller's in the saddle. Gotta cut 'em in two, sometimes, an' Pinto is a wise one."

"Thank you," said Bob. "I'll remember that."

"That's all right, Bob," said Jack. "Now crawl his hump an' stick."

Bob mounted with a quickness that showed familiarity with the saddle and rode out past the chuck-wagon, where Mandy Lee was bossing preparations for a start. Her own horse stood close at hand.

"I am very grateful to you, Miss Travis," he told her. "I wanted this job more than I've wanted anything for years."

"You are welcome to anything I did for you," she answered. "All dad needs is a little poke now and then to wake him up, and he is a good old cowman. Don't let anything touch Pinto behind the saddle. He'll wake up right pronto and show you something if that happens. Two years ago Jack was riding him and roped a bobcat in a scrubby tree. He yanked it out and it lit on Pinto's hips. If you know how a bobcat works when he's mad, you wont blame Pinto for bucking ever since when his back is touched."

"What became of Jack?"

"Oh, Pinto stood him on his ear in a cactus-clump. He got up mad and shot that poor cat full of holes, as it was making off with his rope. I had to pick cactus-spines out of his shoulders and neck for two hours, with him cussing at every jerk."

Bob laughed and started to turn Pinto Eastern fashion, pulling on one rein. The horse stiffened his neck and failed to respond.

"Don't do that!" said Mandy Lee sharply. "That proves you a tenderfoot right off the reel. Draw the rein across his neck the way you want him to turn and never do it unless you do want to turn."

"There, that's better. Let me give you one more tip, before you go. Don't 'Mister' anybody. Call the men by their first names or nicknames right away. They will like you better for it."

"But your father—I should say Mr. Travis to him, shouldn't I?"

"No. Dad is Tom to everyone, just the same as I'm Mandy Lee to man, woman and child for fifty miles. We don't put on any frills here."

"I'll remember, Mandy Lee," said Bob, giving the name an intonation that brought a quick flush to her cheek.

He was off after the punchers instantly, riding fairly well, but in a way that showed him unused to this type of saddle. Over-taking the bunch, he let Pinto take his own gait and he promptly chose a running walk that took him through the crowd to near the front. Bob found himself riding beside Red Guinn, and Red welcomed him with a smile.

"Aint used to a California tree, eh?" he remarked, noticing that Bob was not quite at ease. "What kind ye done been ridin'?"

"What you'd call a pancake saddle. Just the type they use on quiet nags in the Eastern parks," answered Bob.

"Them kind, huh? Aint worth a damn fer anythin' outside o' parks. I see some once when I was in California. See a bunch o' fellers play some kind o' game on ponies. Hoss-pool or suthin' like that."

"Polo," corrected Bob. "Yes, they use them in that, and smaller ones in racing. I suppose I'll get accustomed to this type in a few days. I can see its advantages for rough work."

"They aint nothin' like it fer real ridin'. A feller that rides forked long an' straight kin use his upper works any way he likes, where a feller on a pancake saddle rolls right off unless he sits jest so. Kin any park rider on a pancake do this?" asked Red, letting his body drop over the shoulder of his horse and rising again with a handful of sand from the road. "I don't guess so."

"Well, hardly!" answered Bob.

THE cavalcade crossed a ridge and started down a long slope. A group of rough, unpainted buildings came in view.

"That thar is the Double T home place," explained Red, pointing with a gauntleted hand. "Two mile yet afore we git thar."

Bob looked at the buildings, dwarfed in the distance, at the long vista of broken, rolling plain that sloped gently southward into old Mexico, and the rocky, brushy mountains rising to the north. He turned in his saddle to get the full sweep of the landscape. He gazed down into the deep throat of a box-cañon with vertical sides.

"Rough country for cattle," he remarked. "It must take a real rider to negotiate these hills and draws with all the rocks and brush."

"It shore does," said Red with a chuckle. "It's hell on a hoss, too."

They rode into the home yard, and Bob looked about him at the rough buildings and evidences of cowdom's careless habits. He sat still on Pinto and looked off at the blue haze beyond the border. Boomer Purdy rode up at his left and lifted his bridle hand to point.

"Them's the Tarahumare Mountains over yonder," he said. "The Mexicans give three names to the same range, Tarahumare down to Durango, Sierra Madre from there to Durango City and Sierra De Nayarit from there on. Danged funny way they have of namin' things."

Boomer had reversed his quirt, and while he talked had leaned over closer to Bob. Now he drew the butt from Pinto's right hip joint, diagonally across to the left saddle flap, putting plenty of force on it. Instant response to the raking drag came from Pinto.

"Ugh-ee-ah!" said Pinto, and ducked his head between his knees.

Up rose his spine in an arch; in tucked his tail and he bucked. Totally unexpected, the first jolting plunge took Bob's feet out of the stirrups and jerked his body so violently that his hat flew off. A second straight buck was followed by a leap into the air that put Pinto's tail where his head had been a split second before. Bob rocked over to the left till his body was nearly horizontal, his right leg hooked Pinto's body and both his hands gripped the horn. A violent tightening of muscles, and he was back in the saddle.

Now his long legs curved around that round barrel, his heels dug in hard and he put every ounce of his strength into staying with the maddened horse. That he was staying at all was somewhat amazing, for Pinto understood about all the tricks. He sunfished; he straight-bucked, he sunned first one side, then the other, with great speed. He swapped ends twice more; he tried to crush a leg against the corral fence; he ran a few jumps and landed stiff-legged, jumping aside instantly.

THEN the fight went out of him as abruptly as it had started, and he stopped. His sides were heaving violently. Bob slid out of the saddle and leaned against Pinto's shoulder. He had been punished severely, but he grinned at the punchers. A thin stream of blood ran from his nostrils, and his breathing was nearly equal to Pinto's.

"By Godfrey Moses, Lanky Bob kin

stick, even if he did pull leather!" said Splintershin Jake Beardsley.

"Huh! Seems like I remember some one pullin' leather when he rid Steamboat, over to Cheyenne," remarked Bill, and Jake subsided.

Splintershin had been disqualified at the rodeo for this cause.

"Say, fellows, is this the way a chap rides the goat out here? If it is, I think I must be initiated," said Lanky Bob.

"You bet your whiskers!" shouted Red. "Danged if you don't make a real man some day, when them feet get over bein' tender."

"If Pinto lets me live long enough to heal my blisters, you mean. Does he have such spells often?" asked Bob.

"Jest about as often as a greenhorn lets Boomer Purdy ride up an' start enlight'nin' him," said Splintershin Jake dryly. "Boomer seems to hev a danged bad inflorence on Pinto."

"I see!" said Bob. "I think I understand. Well, it is part of my education, but I am afraid I passed a poor examination, slopping all over that horse the way I did."

"Shucks! I've saw Pinto pile Boomer, startin' sudden like he did with you," declared Red. "Don't worry none over the showin' you made. You stuck, an' that's the main thing."

Old Quong came in sight just then, driving the chuck-team and following closely the jogging horses of Tom Travis and Mandy Lee. Mandy went directly to the house, leaving her horse at the door. Tom came on to the corral before dismounting.

"Bill, take keer o' Mandy's hawss," he ordered. "Jake, you an' Sam unhook the chuck-team an' let Quong git busy in the cookhouse."

Quong clambered down from the high seat and surrendered the lines into the hands of Jake. His one eye, trained in reading faces, told him that something had happened since the gang left Atascosa Siding that had amused the men. He grinned at Jake.

"What do? Play tick new fella?" he inquired.

"Aw, Boomer jest tickled ol' Pinto a bit with his quirt, an' Pinto did the rest of it, all right," said Jake, laughing. "Didn't git the new man down, though. That there Lanky Bob kin stick some."

"Boomah, huh?" said Quong, and his eye glowed. "Heap dlamn fool!"

He stalked away to his cookhouse, and Jake remembered suddenly that Boomer had played one too many tricks on Quong, rousing his hate.

Quong needed no more information. He had seen enough in the past years to know just what happened. He could reconstruct every detail.

"Him new boy plenty much ketchee cowpunch joke," he told Mandy Lee when they met twenty minutes later. "Boomah scratchee Pinto back, he buck likee hell. Boomah be one-time dlamn fool!"

"Was he thrown, Quong?" asked Mandy, her tone carrying intimation of war against Boomer.

"Sticke allee same plastah."

"Good!" said Mandy Lee. "He must be something worth while if he can stay with Pinto. I'm going to see Boomer and put a flea in his ear. He can't bust up a new hand with his monkey-tricks and get away with it."

SHE started for the corral, and Quong grabbed for his garbage can. He hated Boomer and hoped to hear him called down hard by Mandy Lee. The can gave an excuse, since the pigpen stood within easy earshot of the horse corral. He followed, his one eye gleaming with delighted anticipation, though his face was expressionless.

"Boomer!" called Mandy Lee from the corral fence. Boomer came hurrying across the corral in answer, and a thought flashed through her brain. It would never do to let the other punchers hear her put up a fight for Bob. They would turn against him at once, if he let a woman fight any part of his battle for him. Her tone changed.

"Boomer, I saw that chestnut with the white stockings down by the picture rock just now. I wish you'd catch him up and gentle him for me. I have been wishing for a year I could ride him."

"Shore thing, Mandy Lee! Jest my size job. I'll have him like a pet kitten fer ye in less'n a month," boasted Boomer, delighted at being selected for this job. "I'll light right out after 'im."

He departed in a swirl of dust as soon as he could swarm over the fence and mount his horse. Quong banged the garbage-can on the fence in deep disgust.

Boomer was barely out of sight when Jack Kling came swinging down the road from the Lazy K, where he had gone

from the forks in the road halfway to Atascosa Siding.

"Bob, you're lected choreboy fer a spell, Tom says," he informed the new employee. "You git one hoss fer ord'nary an' two when they's extry ridin', like fixin' fences. The strawb'ry roan fer the main ridin' an' the blazeface bay fer extry. They're old reliables, both on 'em," said Jack when he reached the corral.

"Who has Pinto?"

"Nobody in particler. He's jest a sort o' emergency hoss."

"I'll trade either the roan or the bay fer him."

"What fer?"

"I'd like to ride him till I can touch his back without getting bucked all over the place."

"Haw - haw - he - haw!" roared Jack. "You'd ride 'im till crack o' doom afore that'd happen. Why, he's gittin' wuss all the time about that."

"I think that's because some of you like to tease him by raking him there," Bob insisted. "I believe I can break him of that trick. I'd like to try it, at least."

"Oh-ho! I reckon I see! Some galoot teched him up a bit while you was in the saddle, eh? Who was it?"

"Never mind. The question before the house is, do I get Pinto?"

"I don't keer, but I kaint say fer sure till I see Tom. I got my orders to give ye the roan an' blazeface bay. I'll let ye know this evenin' how it rides. That do?"

"Surely. What do I go to work at first?"

"The woodpile," answered Jack. "That thar danged woodpile is jest about the pizenest thing I know. It's always runnin' low jest when we're busiest. Tom cusses an' howls over it, when he has to take some perfectly good puncher off'n his hoss an' set 'im to whangin' at that danged wood, ever' li'le spell."

The sun went down that evening with Lanky Bob, as all called him now, swinging an ax with blistered hands, but making no complaint.

CHAPTER III

THAT evening as Bob was taking possession of the bunk assigned to him, Jack hailed him across the room.

"Hey, Lanky! You git Pinto an' the

roan. Only don't fergit an' let somethin' tech him on the back. I don't let even a saddle string hit him thar, unless I wants a rukus."

"Don't you worry none 'bout Bob," said Splintershin. "If you had saw him today, you wouldn't. Why, all he has to do when a hoss begins to buck is to grab the horn an' pull leather. He jest nachully pulls so hard he shets off all a hoss'es wind, an' he caint buck more'n twicet. I heered the bones crack when he laid back an' give Pinto a sample o' his muscle, an' they was a good foot o' free air under the saddle. Lifted hisself, saddle an' all, plumb clear."

A yell went up from the gang at Splintershin Jake's version of the fight between Pinto and his rider. Bob was grinning from ear to ear, immensely amused. By the light of the kerosene lamp his grin was plainly visible to the punchers, and they liked it.

His first days on the ranch brought him many blisters, a great deal of chaffing from the punchers, some horseplay wherein he shone as a star player himself, a good bit of soreness to unused muscles and much information.

His standing with the punchers was of the best, and old Quong had taken to him like one drop of quicksilver to another. The Chink had led many a *tong* fight and carried many scars. Thick-chested, powerful and without fear, he had been a great warrior. Now his soul sang within him at finding another fighter, one worthy of his allegiance.

Quong had cooked at the Double T ranch since Mandy Lee could toddle alone. He had come there long ago, sour from his *tong* wars, vicious and deadly in spirit, ready to go on the warpath at a whisper. He had known another name on the coast and there was a price upon his head. The ranch made a good refuge for a time. Here he had come under the spell of the little child. He had been near her but a short time till he had forsworn his old gods of crime and battle. He became the faithful servitor for her sake. To protect her from harm he would have dared the the worst hell conceived by religious enthusiasts. He watched over her with an interest that excluded all other thought.

Shortly after his coming he had learned of bandit-raids across the border into Arizona's territory, wherein no woman was safe, unless stoutly defended. Promptly

Quong had produced from some hiding-place his sawed-off gun, his knife and a small cleaverlike weapon that he wore on his left arm when going abroad. It was held by steel clips.

Presently he bought a pair of the largest belt guns sold in the State. He laid in a large supply of shells and began practicing with them daily behind the cook-house.

"What's all the shootin' fer, Quong?" Tom had asked him.

"Mebbeso one time you gone, allee punchah he gone, come bad fella. Me shootee him heap plenty quick."

"That's it, is it? Goin' to guard the old woman, hey?"

"Damn, no. Ol' woman plenty much lookee out foh Sa' Jane. Me heap watchee Mandy Lee allee time."

LOVING Mandy Lee and admiring Lanky Bob, Quong soon began to dream of a union. He planned it all out in his own mind and began trying to fatten Bob up to his own standard of manly requirements. He boldly and shamelessly favored Bob in the matter of grub, slipping him some extra tidbit frequently. Bob began to fill out the hollows.

When he had been working for the Double T about five weeks, Tom's superior fraction came home. She had been visiting her relatives in Texas for two months. Tom drove to Atascosa Siding with the buckboard and brought her home with him.

"Sa' Jane's home ag'in," said Bill to Splintershin as they rode up to the corral that night. "Notice them duds on the line?"

"Fer gosh sake! Them's her'n, right enough. No other woman ever wore sech gosh-fired duds as them, since Adam was a yearlin'."

"Ye-up, an' now we gotta walk a crack an' whisper. Dang that ol' sage-hen, anyhow! I wisht she'd kep' on goin' straight east."

"What good would that 'a' done? She'd 'a' come bobbin' up behind us bime-by an' ketched us unexpected-like. Jus' as soon have her come back as go clear round and come in the other way."

Before Sa' Jane Travis had been at home twenty-four hours she had wormed out of Tom the details of his first meeting with Lanky Bob. Promptly she decided that she did not like him and never would. Before another day had passed, she thought

she noticed a softer glow in Mandy Lee's eyes when she spoke to Bob or about him. That convinced her that she did not like Bob and hardened her resolution to be rid of him very soon.

"I don't like that new hand very much," she began.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Mandy Lee, flushing.

"He was just a plain hobo when yer paw tuk 'im on. Picked 'im out'n a box-car, he says. When a able-bodied feller goes hoboin' round the country thataway, they's a nigger in the woodpile, some'ers. That's a plenty fer me," sagely remarked her mother.

There she let things hang and simmer for two days. Then she opened a new attack and carried it farther.

"Whadda we know bout'n him, anyway? Maybe a runner fer a hossthief gang, er a outlaw hisself, fer all we know. Pickin' help out'n box-cars is resky business, an' Tom Travis oughtta know it."

"He's a good worker, and Jack Kling says he is all right."

"Huh! Jack Kling, hey? Don't remember the time Jack picked out a feller in Tucson an' brung 'im home with 'im, hey? Swore the feller was all right an' a fast-rate cowhand. Said he'd worked with 'im up in Idyho, an' the feller lit out across the line with a passel of yer paw's best hosses four days later. Jack is a good un to pick 'em. I'll pin a heap o' faith to what *he* says!"

"I don't care! Bob is different," Mandy asserted with some heat.

"You don't know nothin' about it," said Sa' Jane. "Jest wait."

SOON after this conversation Jack sent Bob with Splintershin and Oklahoma Dan to drive home a band of yearlings Tom had bought at an auction held three miles beyond Atascosa Siding. As they jingled into Atascosa and saw the sign swinging before the saloon of Pete Cummins, Dan turned to the others.

"What say we irrigate, fellers?"

"Keerect an' proper," answered Jake.

They slid off their horses and entered the saloon. Bob had quite suddenly gone silent, and his eyes held a strained eagerness. He wet his lips frequently with his tongue and hugged the bar closely. He could hardly wait for the others to lift their glasses, and the moment Dan said, "Here's how!" threw his portion down

his throat and flipped a coin on the bar for a second round.

Five minutes later he called for a third drink, and Dan looked at him as he lifted his glass.

"Time we was movin' along, fellers," he said. "Jest as soon as we let this trickle, we're due to light out. We don't linger none."

They drank and filed out, Bob casting longing glances backward as they went. Jake looked past him at Dan, and his gaze was sober.

When they started back with the yearlings, Bob wanted to hurry. He was impatient, and his horse kept crowding the stock.

"Easy, Bob! Don't rush 'em," cautioned Dan. "Wont do to haze 'em."

He reined in his horse as Dan admonished him, but soon he was on top of the young cattle again, pushing them along faster. This time Splintershin Jake spoke to him.

"Looky here, Bob, them critters haint a-goin' to be rushed. Them's orders, an' we're goin' to foller 'em. What's bitin' ye, anyhow? Loll around in that saddle an' take it easy. They aint no rush, as fur as I kin see. Ye act like ye had a date with a girl."

"I have an appointment to keep, but not with a girl," said Bob. "I promised John I would be right back, as soon as I could come."

"John who?"

"John Barleycorn! He is an old acquaintance I haven't met for several weeks, and I'm aching to have a jolly good time with him."

"Huh! Didn't know you was chummy with John. How come?"

Bob merely laughed, a shaky kind of laugh, and tried to sing a drinking song, but had to stop half through the first stanza. He relapsed into a moody silence and said nothing more until they had passed the sign that beckoned to convivial persons and were passing the little station. Then Bob whirled his horse and called back to Dan and Jake.

"I'm going back to keep my engagement with John."

HE was off with the words, riding recklessly. Dan watched him go and then rode over to the loading-pen and opened a gate.

"Haze 'em in, Jake," he said. "We gotta

git that *hombre* home with us er never face Mandy Lee ag'in. If we sashay in without 'im, there'll be hell to pay. Tom wants his choreboy, an' the feller that loses him will have to chop wood more'n he cares fer."

They rounded the yearlings into the pen and rode back to the saloon. Bob was just downing his third drink and had made them all bumpers.

"Looking for me, or are you in need of refreshment?" he asked as he lowered his empty glass. "If the first, just get to hell out of here. If the latter, just line up and state your preference. This thing back of the bar, with the red face and a paunch, has a choice assortment of chemicals that he calls drinks.

"There are some that have the hydrochloric bite, and some that are more nearly like sulphuric. Some resemble cyanide solution in their speedy action, and others work more slowly, like canker. They are all more or less deadly, however. Make your selection and give your orders. It is all one, whether you die today or next week."

"Damn!" whispered Jake. "I haint got no appetite fer liquor after all that. Gimme ginger ale an' a sack o' tobacco."

"I'll take the same," said Dan. "Bob, you're gosh-awful today."

Bob laughed and threw another drink down his gullet, promptly pouring another. This followed the last, and so did two more, poured in the glass and down his throat with equal speed.

"Say, you fellows are tame, too damned tame," he said. "Come on! Let's make a night of it and see who has the hardest head. Bet I can drink you both under the table before ten o'clock."

"We're not bettin' just now," said Jake. "Come on, Bob. Time we had them yearlin's movin' along."

"Nothing doing, Jake. I'm here for a long session." And Bob took his tenth drink of clear whisky.

He was swallowing them fast, in an evident desire to drink enough to intoxicate him for a long time. The liquor was just beginning to bite and his voice was thickening.

"You're comin' now if I have to crown ye with a spittoon to git ye started," said Dan. "Jake!"

At the word both men seized Bob, each by an arm. Each brought the arm down and back, thrusting one of his own through

its bend and gripping the wrist hard. Then they walked out, dragging Bob backwards with his heels raking the floor as he struggled to free an arm.

They dragged him to his horse and paused there, while he raved and fought to get free. All at once Jake stooped near Bob's ear.

"Mandy Lee!" he said, in a low tone, and Bob stopped struggling.

"Fellows, I'm a damned shkunk," he declared dejectedly. "Tie me on horsh—take me home. Shtick me in bunk an' keep Man'y Lee 'way."

They hoisted him to his horse and roped him there so he would not fall off. By the time they were mounted and leading his horse away, he had forgotten the reference to Mandy Lee and was begging for a bottle to carry with him, his voice growing ever thicker.

"Jus' a li'lle bo'le, Dan. On'y a li'lle one, Zhake. Jus' a pint, Dan. Awf'ly dry road an' dushy 'tween here an' Double T ranch. Have a heart, Zhake! Go get me li'lle bo'le, thersh a goo' fella!"

"Aint whisky hell!" said Jake in sober, hard emphasis.

"Damn whisky!" exploded Dan. "It tastes good when ye git used to it, but what a pizen damn fool a feller is when it rides 'im?"

"Uh-huh! Guess we seen what made a hobo out o' Bob, right enough."

THEY rode back to the ranch, drove the yearlings into a pasture and took Bob to the bunk-house, praying that Sa' Jane might not see. They carried him in, undressed him and stowed him in his bunk, then lied carefully and manfully to Mandy Lee.

They made her believe that Bob was suffering from shock, having been thrown from his horse when the animal fell in running down a steep slope after a bolting yearling. They maintained stoutly that they had forced some whisky down his throat in an effort to bring him round again and the whisky had made him sick, not being one of the kind accustomed to its use.

Sa' Jane overheard their assertions from behind her window and doubted them greatly. She came out and started for the bunk-house. Dan and Jake did not notice her until she had covered half the distance, as they were standing with their backs to the door.

"My God, Jake, there goes Sa' Jane, an' the fat's in the fire," said Dan as Mandy Lee entered the house.

"Sure as hell!" gasped Jake. "She'll poke around until she finds he's jest spifflicated, an' then she'll start things a-goin'."

"What can we do?"

"Not a thing! It's past doin' now. It's all done did, a'ready. The old woman's inside the bunk-house."

"C'mon, Jake! Let's slope! I think the ol' man wants us."

They mounted hastily and sent their horses out on the trail to the lower range at a high lope, knowing themselves powerless to help Lanky Bob.

CHAPTER IV

S A' JANE came out of the bunk-house and made a straight wake for Mandy Lee. Her long, thin nose was twitching with eagerness to save her child from a disastrous association. She found Mandy Lee and opened up with a salvo.

"Them two punchers beat old Ananias all holler fer lyin'," she announced. "That there Bob feller is jest plain stewed. They aint no doubt about it. He haint been throwed ner nothin' like it. That pair o' mavericks jest been lyin' to perfect him. Here yer paw an' me hes kept the respectable ranch in Arizony all these years, an' now we got a tramp a-layin' in our bunk-house, dead drunk!"

"Oh, Lawdy, that the Double T should come to this! I've saw some punchers git jingled afore this, o' course, but never no puncher on this ranch ever got completely paralyzed like this yere Bob feller done, when he was workin'. It's plain what made a tramp out of him. I don't need no telescope to see that!"

So the tide of her monologue swept over poor Mandy Lee, without regard to the misery showing in the brown eyes.

"I knowed that hobo hadn't no call to hole up around yere, fust time I see 'im. Felt right off he aint decent, an' now he lays thar in our bunk-house,"—with a dramatic gesture and turn of the head,— "as drunk as a fiddler, an' smellin' o' whisky louder'n ol' Tim Dunn. Mandy Lee, that feller leaves this ranch fer keeps, er I'll know the reason why! Them's my last words!"

"You been standin' up fer him right

along, like he'd hired ye tuh plead fer 'im in co't, but if ye've got any shame left, ye're bound tuh be 'shamed now. Don't ye never let me ketch ye noticin' that ornery, no-count, low-down, sneakin', yeller—"

Mandy Lee stood it as long as she could, but at last the strain grew too great to bear.

"Maw, you hush!" said the harried girl.

Then she ran out through the open door, down the path to the bunk-house door, paused for one peep that showed her a tousled head in a low bunk and a slack arm drooping over the side, then on to where her horse stood half asleep in the corral.

She threw on the saddle and cinched it, flung herself across its worn seat and rode furiously away. Until her mother had uttered her tirade against Bob, Mandy Lee had not acknowledged to herself that her interest in him went any farther than her interest in any puncher of the Double T. She had assured herself many times that she merely admired him for his use of the English language, so out of harmony with ordinary tramp lingo, and for his superb defense that first day at the loading pens.

Now she realized, painfully, that she cared a great deal and that hearing him abused hurt her keenly. The Arizona sunshine had turned dull and brassy. The clear, sweet air of the mountain breeze choked her like the fumes of boiling chemicals.

A S Mandy Lee sent her horse over the crooked trail that led far up to a ridge in the north, Tom Travis rode back to his home to see Lanky Bob. He had told him to tackle that woodpile again, just as soon as he returned with the yearlings. He found the ax sticking in a block, just where he had seen it in the morning.

"Sa' Jane, where did Lanky go, after he come back?" he called.

"He didn't go nowhar. He was drug," answered Sa' Jane through a window. "Jake an' Dan drug 'im inside an' throwed 'im in a bunk. He's a-layin' thar right now, drunk as a lord an' smellin' o' whisky wuss'n ol' Tim Dunn ever did in his wust spree."

Tim Dunn epitomized the drink evil to Sa' Jane, and she was fond of alluding to him as the acme of disgusting self-indulgence.

Tom jogged over to the bunk-house, verified the fact of Bob's present incapacity and returned to Sa' Jane.

"He aint so danged bad off as you think," he told her. "Jest got a modrate sort o' jag on. He'll be all right tomorrer. I aim to hev him git a jag o' wood ready fer the wagon and drive it fer us. Old Quong hates to drive an' wants to look out fer his pots an' pans."

"Tom Travis, be you figgerin' on keepin' that booze-fighter?"

"I sure am. What about it?"

"Plenty about it. You oughtta be 'shamed to keep sech a feller on the place, an' I want 'im fired. You git shet o' Lanky Bob today, Tom Travis, if he's able to walk—tomorrer, if he caint travel 'fore then. I don't want to see his face after that, nuther."

"I aint a-goin' to do no sech thing, Sa' Jane. I need 'im. 'Sides, it aint fair tuh drap 'im jest cause his foot slipped once."

"Once is 'nough fer me, as fur as he's concerned. You fire him."

"Wont do it, by doggies! Fust time in ten year I've been free from that dawg-goned woodpile botherin' me. If I fire Bob, I'll hev to turn a puncher loose on it. They hate it like blazes, an' I caint spare one, anyhow. Bob stays, an' I don't want no more yap about it."

SA' JANE tried hard to break Tom's resolution, but for once he was adamant. He steadily refused to fire Bob.

"Look yere, ol' woman, I done had a plenty o' this talk," he said at last. "Bob stays yere, an' you may as well hush. I aint a-goin' to give in an' fire 'im if ye talk till pigs hev wings. It aint like he boozed reg'lar. He only gits overcome 'casional-like. I've saw your ol' paw skatin' bow-laiged an' bleary-eyed more'n once. Lay off'n me an' Bob, er I'll tell ye some more ye wont keer to hear."

"That's right, Tom Travis! Throw Paw's failin' in my face! Haint that jest why I hates a sot? Think I want my gal to go through what I've saw my maw put up with?"

"What in thunder has Mandy Lee got to do with this yere fuss?"

"You ol' fool, she's been gittin' in-trusted in 'im, an' fust thing you know, she'll be gittin' spliced to a-oo-hoo-whisky-guzzlin' ow-oo-hoo-hobo! Oh, my good Lawd!" And Sa' Jane threw her apron over her head and rocked from side to side.

"Sa' Jane Travis, you talk like you'd been eatin' loco-weed. Yer plumb crazy in

the haid. Mandy Lee wouldn't no mo' take up with Bob that away than I'd vote to make Villa gov'nor of Arizony."

Down came the apron and up came the head of Sa' Jane. From her lips poured such a stream of words as Tom had never endured before, though he had bragged: "Sa' Jane kin lay out the Amurican language better'n any female twixt Yuma an' El Paso, when she gits started on it right." Now he stood the deluge for two minutes, then broke for his horse. He went past the house at a gallop.

"That's right, Tom Travis, run away from hearin' the truth if ye haint man enough to listen!" she shrieked after him. "I'll git ye where I want ye afore I'm a day older—see if I don't!"

But Tom gave her little chance for curtain-lectures. He had made his plans to run a fence along a three-quarter-mile stretch of low and nearly level land, to keep his cattle and those of the Lazy K from drifting together. He had planned to have Bob drive the team that hauled the wire and grub. A stove was bolted fast to the bed, just back of the center of the wagon. A barred gate across the bed kept the piled reels of wire in place.

Quong had orders to prepare a huge kettle of beef-stew, potatoes and other grub. Bob would drive the team, drop the wire along the line and when noon came, would kindle a fire and heat the food. That left Quong at home to make preparations for a big meal at night.

LANKY BOB came out of the bunk-house the next morning very much ashamed of himself. He was silent and took no part in the conversation at breakfast. He was on the wagon and off before Sa' Jane had a chance at Tom.

Tom withstood her sullenly during the five minutes she had him under fire, steadily refusing to fire Bob.

"Yer wastin' wind, ol' woman. Might as well hush up. I want ye Bob until I git ready, an' I aint ready now, by a dang sight!"

Sa' Jane recognized the futility of further comment and closed her remarks with a reference to pigheadedness.

Bob avoided meeting the reproachful gaze of Mandy Lee for many days. He worked hard and said little. The other punchers knew how Sa' Jane had worked to oust Bob, and sympathized with him.

"He jest nachully hates to have Mandy

Lee know he got drunk," said Splintershin Jake. "Wants to make her think he's a lil' ol' he angel, an' it makes him sore to think them black quills showed so dang plain onced. Jest as though Mandy Lee never saw no cow-punch celebrate nothin' afore! Jest you wait till I roll my tail an' start hellwards an' skyhootin' about six P. G. the night afore the Fourth! Then she *can* stare, fer I'm plannin' to git lit up like forty thousand searchlights. I'll look like the Dewey Arch a-comin' down the trail."

"Yah! You'll play merry hell, you will, after promisin' Mandy Lee you'd stick to a limit o' three drinks, per. They's about nine punchers all ready to ride ye if ye break that solemn oath ye tuk, an' they haint a-goin' to muffle their spurs, nuther. You're talkin' in the past tense, Jake, an' if ye aint a dum fool, ye know it."

Bill glared at the thin-shanked puncher as he finished speaking. Jake grinned up at him from where he sat, and licked the paper on his new smoke. Snapping a match, he set the flame to the tobacco.

"Caint a feller blow off steam?" he asked, squinting through the smoke. "Aint no law compellin' a feller to hold in until he busts, is they? If they is, it musta been passed sence Friday, fer I heered a danged ol' wreck of a cow-punch with a pair o' laigs on 'im that looked like a machinist's calipers, roarin' an' yowlin' about bein' so dry his liver was crackin'. Mebbe you know 'im."

Bill glanced down at his bowed legs, then grinned at Jake.

"Gimme y'er tebacker. I got papers," he said.

FOR weeks Lanky Bob went about his duties in silence. His work kept him apart from the rest most of the time, with occasional periods of joining them in some emergency. When with them he was pleasant and kindly at all times, but he did not make conversation.

When he met Mandy Lee, his attitude was that of respectful attention and never-failing courtesy, but he no longer joked with her. One day she rode past where he was mending a fence and stopped her horse.

"Bob, I want to speak to you," she called to him. Instantly he left his hammer drop and turned to face her.

"At your service, Miss—"

"Bob!" said Mandy.

"Mandy Lee," said he, slowly and sorrowfully.

"That's better. Don't you try that again," she admonished him. "I want you to stop being so gloomy. Act human again."

"Mandy Lee, that's mighty kind of you. But it's foolish," said he. "I am just a hobo, a tramp, a bum! I got drunk. I've been drunk many times before, but I thought I never would again, after I met you."

"Pinto bucked with you, but you rode him again. Now you ride him more than half the time," she replied softly.

He looked startled. The analogy between the two cases struck him forcibly. Then he answered her gravely:

"If my appetite for alcohol could be ridden like a horse, I'd ride it. I'd be safe. It's a sly, sneaking thing, that lies quiet and passive until I believe it dead. Then it comes to life when I least expect it and am least prepared to fight it."

"It grapples with me so quickly that I have no time to brace my resolution. It has me down before I realize I'm slipping."

Mandy Lee had a pretty lip, but now it curled in a sneering way.

"You're the last man that I expected to show the white feather. When the shacks jumped you in the car, you fought. When Pinto nearly dumped you, you grabbed the horn and pulled leather, but you got back into the saddle and rode him. But when whisky bucks you over just a little bit off the saddle, you let go and flop."

"Look here, Bob, you listen to me! I'd a heap rather see you pull leather than see you piled."

She was gone with a sputter of flying hoofs, leaving him staring after her, slowly shaking his head.

"I'll pull leather if I have to, Mandy Lee!" he said aloud as he turned to his work once more.

CHAPTER V

LANKY BOB had been a busy man since he came to the Double T. He had kept that woodpile so well that it had grown far beyond any power of daily consumption to wipe it out. He stacked it carefully and always endeavored to rebuild any wrecked portion of the last tier before he slept at night.

He had learned the art of caring for

leather, till he was able to keep saddles, bridles and harnesses soft and pliable. He had repaired miles of fences and helped build other miles.

Along with his work he had managed to learn from Spoutin' Jim, a silent, solitary sort of puncher, so named in derision of his silent habit, the correct way to throw a six-gun. From Kling he had learned to flip a rope, in the quick, half-concealed manner used by punchers when they seek to catch something unwarned.

From the combined tutelage of the rest he had acquired the trick of riding a steer down and sending a wide loop circling over his horns or about a lifted leg. From them he had learned the throwing, hog-tying and branding, the ear-marking and the bronco-busting.

Now, after nearly two years at the Double T, he was accounted a good cowhand. He rode them straight up and did not pull leather. He still clung to old Pinto and made a pet of him.

Long ago he had amazed the bunch by his handling of Pinto. When he first took the horse, it resented any touch behind the saddle, while being ridden. Six months afterward Bob sat in the saddle, turned and rested one hand on that scarred, sensitive back. A number of exclamations greeted his performance. Pinto had merely blinked lazily, yawned and rubbed his nose against a foreleg.

"How in blazes did ye git 'im broke to that?" demanded the men.

"Just by being patient and showing him he wouldn't be hurt. It took me two months to get him so that I could touch him there in safety when I stood beside him. After that it was easy."

FOR over a year after his first drunk

Bob had kept straight. Then he had been offered a drink from a bottle by a puncher who passed him on the road. He had refused at first, but the puncher, half drunk and insistent, had drawn the cork and offered the bottle once more with an unsteady hand. He splashed a little whisky on Bob's sleeve and the fumes rose to his nostrils. He took the bottle, tilted it and swallowed thrice. Then he handed it back and rode for Atascosa.

There he drank four times and tipped the bottle to fill his glass the fifth time. A voice seemed to say to him, "Pull leather, Bob!" and he set the bottle back, paid the barkeeper and walked out.

He rode fast and came to where Oklahoma Dan and Spoutin' Jim were skinning a dead cow they had found. He brought his mount to a stop, with white lather showing back of the forelegs and around the saddleskirts. He beckoned to Jim and leaned far over the shoulder of his horse. His voice was hoarse and his eyes hard.

"Tell Tom I've got business in Tucson that can't wait. I'll be back in three days. Tell Mandy Lee I'm pullin' leather."

He straightened in the saddle and lifted his horse into a lope. Jim looked after him sadly.

"Either he's gone on a toot or he's gone to hide an' fight it out with himself alone," he said. "Poor Bob!"

Jim gave the message to Tom, who nodded comprehendingly. Then he found Mandy Lee alone and gave her the other message.

"He reckoned you'd understand," he said gently, and she nodded.

Bob had ridden directly to Tucson, had rented a room in a quiet part of town, put his horse in a stable and waited. Two nights and a day of hard fighting, and then his insane desire died down to a smolder. He left Tucson in the early morning of the third day and rode up to the Double T, sane and sober, in midafternoon.

Sa' Jane looked him over carefully, saw that he was stark sober and passed him by with a sniff. She had lost no part of her dislike for him. More than ever she hated the lank, long-geared ex-hobo. Since Bob had made good and Mandy Lee had joined forces with her father, Sa' Jane had decided to lie low and await developments.

Another six months went by, and his second year was nearly gone. Bob and Mandy Lee attended a dance. Every man and woman within fifteen miles who could dance and was able to ride, attended with them. Bob danced with Mandy Lee twice, saw her taken out for the third dance by a good-looking puncher from the Cross J, ten miles west, and looked about for a partner. His evil genius led him to the chair that held Kate Brockman, Mandy Lee's pet aversion.

When Mandy Lee saw Bob dancing with Kate, she set her lips hard together in a straight line and gave the next dance to Bill Lyman, a hard nut from the Sawbuck.

After that, for the balance of the dance it was seesaw, one up and t'other down. If Mandy Lee felt a softening of the heart and looked for Bob, she found him having

a gay time with some girl she disliked. If Bob began to wonder if he could not make it all right with Mandy, he found her flirting outrageously with some puncher she would scorn to wipe her shoes on under ordinary circumstances.

They rode home together, with Bob making a number of efforts to start an easy conversation, to no purpose. At the door Mandy Lee left him with a nut to crack.

"Next time you'd better take Kate Brockman with you. She seems about what you like best."

MATTERS did not run between Bob and Mandy Lee so smoothly after the dance. She felt aggrieved and out of patience with him, and he was indignant that she should treat him thus. Then the fall round-up brought matters to a head. One of the boys got spilled, with his bronc' rolling over him, and Bob was the first man to reach him. A new man in the outfit raced his cutting-out pony over to the place where the men bedded down at night and came tearing back with a bottle. Bob took it and pulled the cork with his teeth, one hand being busy with holding the injured man. He slopped some of the whisky fairly into his nostrils and on his lips in doing so. He gritted his teeth and poured the liquor down the waiting throat of the broken man.

When the man had been lifted on a blanket and carried away to a bed among the rocks, to await the doctor Spoutin' Jim had gone after, there remained a small amount of whisky in the half-pint bottle. Bob corked it, pulled the cork, smelled the liquor, pushed the cork home once more and suddenly jerked it out.

His eyes were blazing as he tipped the bottle above his mouth and let its contents trickle down his throat. He hurled the bottle at a rock, swung into the saddle and worked the rest of the day, feverishly. It was the last day of the round-up.

That night Bob spent in Atascosa. By midnight he was just drunk enough to be dangerous, and Pete Cummins handled him gently. In the morning he came back before Pete opened up, and he was there when Pete went home to his noonday meal, leaving his emergency man, Felipe Yorba, behind the bar. When Pete returned at one o'clock, Bob was too far gone to do more than sit still in a wabbly fashion and sing.

"Come on, Felipe," said Pete. "That baby's money is all gone, and he's a nuisance around here. Grab that side of him."

It so happened that Sa' Jane had persuaded Mandy Lee to accompany her that afternoon in making a call on Mrs. Coleman in Atascosa. Now, there may have been, and probably was, a certain amount of method in Sa' Jane's action. She knew that Bob had strayed from the straight and narrow. She knew that he had gone to Atascosa, for Tom had told her. Also, she knew that the Coleman windows furnished a clear view of the saloon and its yard.

Sa' Jane had seated herself in a chair that faced a window. She could look down into the back yard of Pete's saloon without stirring. The window stood wide open.

"Mandy Lee, what's them things a-stickin' up out of Pete's ol' ashbar?" said Sa' Jane very blandly that afternoon. "Funny lookin'."

Mandy Lee turned and looked. Seated in the ash-barrel, his long legs doubled, his shins and feet hung outside, was Lanky Bob. His hat was jammed on his head crossways and lopsided; his clothing was dirty and disheveled.

Across the spaces there floated to Mandy's ear the disjointed, huskily muffled accents of a song, broken by hiccoughs:

"Oh, bury me not on the lone prai-ree—"

Mandy Lee turned away from the window, quivering in every fiber.

"Seems to me I've heered that voice singin' round our bunk-house. Who can it be?" remarked Sa' Jane with every appearance of innocence.

Without a word to her mother, Mandy Lee walked out of the room, put her hat on and left the house. A moment later the sound of her horse at a hard gallop came drifting back to the women.

"Seems to me you're mighty hard on Mandy Lee," said Mrs. Coleman. "Couldn't you have worked it some other way, Sa' Jane?"

"Haint I been a-tryin' fer nigh about two year, an' she that stubborn nothin' teched her? She hed to have a lesson, an' I hope she don't fergit it right away, nuther. Now I guess Tom wont hold out ag'in' me no more about firin' that hobo."

SA' JANE held a session with Tom as soon as she could catch him. This time she had evidence enough to make Tom

waver. Mandy Lee came into the room while he hesitated, and he turned to her.

"Mandy Lee, yer maw keeps a-hammerin' at me 'bout lettin' Bob go. He's a danged good man, an' I hates to lose 'im; but he goes if you say so. How about it, gal?"

"Let him go. I never want to see him again," said Mandy Lee.

"All right, then. He goes," said Tom, and went out to see Kling.

"Jack, git two men to go down to Pete Cummins' place an' git Bob out of his ash-bar'l. Bring 'im home an' sober 'im up. He's fired, but I aim to give 'im a sober start."

He gave Jack a brief account of the row he had been through with Mrs. Travis, and how Mandy Lee had cast the deciding vote.

"Tell them boys to handle 'im kind. Thar aint nothin' gained by treatin' the poor devil mean. They may need coddlin' a bit their own selves some day. Thar aint no knowin'."

MANDY LEE spent many hours in tears before Lanky Bob was brought round by repeated soakings with cold water and sundry doses of strong coffee made and served by the loving hands of Quong. Bob was not able to walk decently till late afternoon. That day was Sunday, and most of the punchers were off. Spoutin' Jim had remained very close to Bob, and when he was able to stagger out and sit on a rock, it was Jim who helped him and sat down beside him.

For hours they sat silent, Jim whittling a soft pine stick and chewing slowly on his "eatin' tobaccor" as he waited for Bob to speak. Bob understood, and the silent sympathy touched him. His head ached, and his limbs were weak. He felt sick.

"Damn the whisky!" murmured Bob, sitting up straight at last.

"Aint it hell?" said the low voice of Jim beside him.

Then followed another hour of silence, until Bob arose and stretched his muscles, flexing his arms and moving his legs to work off the stiffness. Jim got up with him, and they walked slowly off past the bunk-house and down the slope to a ledge. Here they sat down again.

"I been there, Bob," said Spoutin' Jim. "Lost the best woman on earth by drinkin'. Quit me cold, an' I never blamed her none, neither."

"A woman started me to boozing," answered Bob. "Promised to marry me and ran away with my chum. I tried to forget her by boozing. When I woke up to the fact that she wasn't worth it, the whisky had me. I've fought it, but it gets me down about so often."

"Aint it hell?" said the sympathetic voice of Spoutin' Jim again.

The sun dropped behind the mountain, and the dusk of evening began to gather before he spoke again.

"Bob, I been thinkin', settin' here. I fit ag'in' it fer five year before I win. I haint teched the stuff in seven year, Bob. You aint a hopeless case, by a damn sight."

Then they made their way back to the bunk-house together.

THAT evening Bob opened his war-bag and brought out a fountain pen and notepaper. He wrote a short note, slipped it into an envelope and went out. He came back presently and crawled into his bunk.

In the morning Lanky Bob had a talk with Tom, received his pay and a firm handshake. Tom looked more embarrassed than Bob did.

"Danged if I aint sorry, Bob," he said. "I hate like the devil to see ye go. Anything I kin do fer ye?"

"Sell Pinto to me," said Bob.

"All right. Forty bucks, an' he's yourn."

Bob knew the horse was worth not less than sixty, possibly seventy-five, at any ranch in that section. He felt sure that Tom had made the price low to show his feeling toward him. He paid the money.

"Can I see Mandy Lee for just a minute?" he asked.

"She lit out half an hour ago," said Tom. "If you're headin' for the Y Bar Y, ye may run onto her."

Bob mounted Pinto, with his rifle in its boot under his left leg, his six-gun on his right thigh and his war-bag tied on behind. Every puncher in the outfit had shaken his hand and said something cheery at parting. He rode off up the road toward the Y Bar Y.

Mandy Lee was riding back toward home when he saw her, her hands crossed on the horn and her head bowed. He stopped Pinto and watched her approach. When she was still at some distance, she lifted her hands, and covered her face for an instant, then jerked them down, shook her horse into a lope and rode straight toward him.

She pulled her mount to a dead stop when she saw him sitting there beside the road under the shade of a small tree. He rode out at a walk, pulling off his right gauntlet and holding out his hand.

"It is good-by, Mandy Lee, and thank you for everything you've done for me," he said. She backed her horse, still staring at him.

Suddenly she jerked her quirt up beneath his hand, sharply. It cut and stung the bare skin, but the hand never moved nor trembled.

"I hate you! You've shamed me by your actions. Don't you dare speak to me again, ever!"

She slashed her horse across the flank, and he leaped past Bob with a grunt of astonishment. Then she was gone around the curve with the gravel flying. Bob sighed, replaced his gauntlet and started Pinto along the road to the Y Bar Y.

CHAPTER VI

"**S**HORE I'll put ye on!" said Joe Banks, foreman of the Y Bar Y. "Danged glad to git ye. What's Tom Travis thinkin' of to let ye go? We-all figgered you an' Tom was like finger an' thumb."

In two short sentences Bob gave Joe the facts, and Joe laughed.

"Whereaway did Tom Travis git the idee a puncher had to be bone dry? Many's the time I've saw Tom braidin' the road, an' Sa' Jane's paw hadn't no bottom to his belly when it come to red-eye. Gosh! The way that old coot would lush! Sling yer war-bag in Bunk Seven. Gopher Bill Anderson got one o' his reg'lar prospectin' spells an' lit out two days ago. Reckon he's up around Oracle now, headin' into the mountains.

"Say, Bob, that ol' sucker has made seven trips up thar in ten years, huntin' fer a ledge. He struck float-gold oncet when he was packin' out, an' he goes back tryin' to locate whar it come from. Swears he's goin' to find it yit. Now if you're ready, we'll rack along over to jine them fellers that's lookin' fer screw-worms."

Bob took hold with vigor and understanding, helping the men treat the young calves for the grubs developing under their hides, in sores and nostrils. As he worked, he thought about Gopher Bill, making trip after trip into the mountains in the hope

that he might strike it rich sometime. If Bill could have the patience to try through all these years on one dim trail, why shouldn't he keep on trying to redeem himself from the slavery of whisky?

"Spoutin' Jim fought to a finish and won. Bill will never give up until he either finds that ledge or dies trying. Am I less of a man than either? No! I'm going to cut that crazy spot out of my brain if it takes me ten years, or fifteen; but it won't."

EVERY man at the Y Bar Y knew Lanky Bob and liked him, except one, a new hand Joe had taken on a month earlier. He traveled just now under the name of Olanche Jack Holmes.

Observing him and the slow way in which he answered to this name at times, Bob concluded that it had not been his name very long. His liking for the Y Bar Y outfit could not be stretched far enough to make him cotton to Olanche Jack.

"A natural bum and yegg, if my experience taught me anything," was the mental judgment of Bob. "I think I'll watch Olanche Jack."

Within a week Bob had fitted into the ranch economy so well and effectively that Nat Gibson, the owner, was looking on him as one of the permanent improvements.

Back at the Double T, old Quong See was grumpily mourning Bob's departure. He had rightly sized up Sa' Jane's part in sending him off and would hardly accord her a look. Mandy Lee had to give the orders in order to have them obeyed at all. Even to her Quong growled.

"Him heap bully fella! Whuffaw Sa' Jane allee time whoopee? Heap mo' bet-tah Sa' Jane stay long time down Texas. Allee time chin-chin Sa' Jane."

Mandy Lee quite agreed with Quong that Sa' Jane made too much chin music around the Double T, but for the sake of discipline she shut him up. He quieted down a few minutes, swearing strange oaths under his breath, jumping from the language of America to that of China and then darting off to the Mexican patois. Then he broke out again:

"Maybeso you see 'im at Y Bar Y?"

"No. I shall never go there again."

"Whuffaw you no go? Long time you likee Maly Gibson. Plenty much you likee Lanky Bob. Whuffaw you shakee head?"

"I don't like Mary Gibson, either. Her eyes look like skimmed milk, and she hasn't any more gumption than skimmed milk,

either. Her hair is just about as yellow as his whole soul, and I don't care to hear any more of your talk."

She darted out of the door, and Quong stared after her, puzzled.

THE words of Quong had roused into active life something that had been struggling within her for some days. The seeds of jealousy had begun to sprout, and poor Mary Gibson with her pale blue eyes and yellow hair was its object. As she thought of Bob and his close proximity to those eyes, Mandy Lee trembled with jealous rage.

"If he likes a washed-out, slimpy thing like Mary, he can have her," she told herself, with a stab of pain in her heart.

Sa' Jane had triumphed in her drive against Bob, but she did not know how to leave well enough alone. She hammered steadily in an effort to make him seem obnoxious to Mandy Lee. She picked up every word of gossip, every hint that could be used to blacken his name and repeated it all at home.

Bob had left the Double T with Mandy Lee hot with indignation on account of his spree and the consequent humiliation given her. Now her mother's continued attacks upon him began to make her revolt.

For months her mother kept constantly dinging at this campaign of discrediting Bob. Slowly but surely the spirit of Mandy Lee veered from hot indignation to commiseration, then to rebellious opposition. In time, unknown to herself, Sa' Jane had wrought so strongly against her own desires that she had reconstructed the spirit of Mandy Lee. Now she was a hot and ardent partisan.

When Bob had been with the Y Bar Y a number of months, there began to be a great many losses of calves through the country. Cows would be trotting about wild-eyed and bawling, searching every band of cattle for their lost offspring. Weaned calves in the little pasture would disappear mysteriously in the night.

The Double T suffered heavily. So did other ranches, but Sa' Jane chose to ignore this fact. She treated the matter as one confined to the Double T. She caught Kling, Tom and Mandy Lee together.

"It's no more'n I expected," she began. "If this don't teach ye a lesson, Tom Travis, ye're past savin'. Pickin' hobs out of box-cars an' tryin' to make decent punchers out of 'em aint wuth while. Fol-

ler yer nose over to the Y Bar Y and string that thar Lanky Bob up to a tree, an' they wont be no more calves stole."

"Damnation!" said Jack in disgust.

"They aint a mite o' evidence p'intin' at Bob," said Tom. "Hesh up an' let Bob rest fer a minute, fer gosh sake!"

"Yes, hush an' let them calves be stole till we haint got a calf on the place! Not much! I haint built that way. I bet ye Bob has some box-cañon fenced an' is hidin' them calves. Mebbe he had help. I never did trust them Y Bar Y punchers none, nohow, but Bob's at the bottom of it. He knowed jest whar we-all kep' them calves."

"Hang it, Sa' Jane! So did half the county," said Tom irritably.

"Maw, you hush!" said Mandy Lee. "Bob aint no more a calf-rustler than I am. He wouldn't steal anybody's calves."

"Highly-tighty, miss! Who hired you to stan' up fer Hobo Bob, hey? Yer maw wa'n't born this week, an' she kin see as fur through a stun as anybody. What do you know about that whisky-guzzlin' snake? He come yere in a box-car, an' he done showed hisself to be a soak. If they's anythin' I hate, it's a sot. An' now you side with 'im ag'in' yer maw. Shame on ye, Mandy Lee!"

Sa' Jane paused to shed a crocodile tear or two, and Mandy Lee took the opportunity to retire from the group. Sa' Jane, listening, heard her retreating footsteps and jerked her apron down from her eyes.

"Mandy Lee!" she called. "There's that pattern Miss Kibbey let me use, an' I done promised her I'd git it back this mawnin'. It's on my dresser. Take it over to 'er, that's a good gal, but go round by the south road. Then ye wont hev to meet none o' them Y Bar Y toughs."

MANDY LEE hailed with delight the chance of getting away. She was on her horse and off in short order. Dutifully she took the south road, but she left it after rounding the first corner that hid her from home observation. She rode up Ash Creek, intending to go up the White Rock Draw and over the ridge to the Lazy K house. That would save about a mile of travel.

Ash Creek is laid out in loops and turns that would lame a snake to follow. Now, it so happened that this morning Joe Banks had sent Lanky Bob and Missouri Ike up around the ridges above Ash Creek with

orders to find and haze out a bunch of wild cattle.

"Them critters is usin' somewheres up thereaway, an' I hearn tell they's three-four of 'em lame. We gotta look out taint foot-an'-mouth disease. Haze 'em down on the flat, an' we'll rope the lame ones an' find out what ails 'em."

They had found two bands of the wild cattle, nearly a hundred in all, had united the two and driven them into the upper reaches of Ash Creek. They hazed them swiftly, hoping they would run straight along the channel until the walls proved too high to climb. Then it would be merely a job of following slowly down to the flat.

"See 'em git! So danged wild their shadders would start 'em off stampedin'. They're safe now," said Ike, urging his horse down into the creek-bed and looking back.

Bob sat his horse on the high ground above, straining his eyes to see something below. He gave a yell to Ike then, and slapped the spurs into his mount. The horse sprang straight out, and Ike held his breath to watch him alight.

"Hell! He made it," gasped Ike in relief as the horse struck far down the steep slope, managed to keep his balance and went springing down the ridge like an antelope. "What the devil hit Bob?"

HE whirled his own horse and forced him up the bank once more. One look showed him what ailed Bob. Tearing along down the twisting box-cañon raced the frantic cattle. Beyond and below them came the white-stockinged chestnut that Boomer Purdy had gentled for Mandy Lee. As Ike saw them first, Mandy Lee was riding with her head a little drooped. She raised it and stopped her horse. Then she reined him around to try the bank, but it rose thirty feet in such steepness that it was nearly vertical.

The stampeding cattle were only a short distance above her, and Lanky Bob was riding recklessly a length or two ahead of them on the ridge above. As Ike watched, he saw Mandy Lee wheel her chestnut to start down the channel, but the brute had heard the coming cattle and had gone stark mad with fear. He plunged, struck a shoulder against the bank, veered a little and charged the opposite bank.

He scrambled up about his own length, slipped, plunged and fell. At the same

moment Lanky Bob whirled the crazy sorrel he was riding till it faced the creek and sent it slithering down that almost vertical wall on its haunches. Ike gasped again, astonished at such reckless riding in a land where reckless riding is a daily stunt.

"A fool fer luck! How the devil did he do it?" exclaimed Ike.

He could look down on the windings of the channel and see the entire play. He could see the wild cattle just turning the second curve above Bob when his mount struck the channel bottom. Then the dust they raised shut off his view.

The dust-cloud rose continuously like the smoke from a locomotive at full speed. It turned and writhed and twisted, but always it rose farther down toward the flat. The stampede had never checked for an instant. Ike started down the channel, shivering at what he was afraid he might see there.

CHAPTER VII

IKE rode down the cañon until he felt sure that he had passed the spot where he had last seen Mandy Lee, where Bob had made his reckless slide on the back of the sorrel. He had carefully scanned every inch of the bottom, feeling half sick at every new turn, but no gruesome trace had met his eye.

"I wonder if that thar crazy son-of-a-gun made it, after all? It looks like they done got away," he mused. "Poke along, ol' hoss, an' get us out o' here. I'd like to know suthin' more about this."

He came out to the flat and saw the cattle scattered along the farther line, stopped by the fence that ran between the Lazy K and its next neighbor. There was no sign of Mandy Lee or Lanky Bob.

He rode diagonally past the cattle and saw Mandy Lee sitting on a rock far ahead. Then he glimpsed Lanky Bob coming back to her from around the shoulder of a hill, leading the chestnut in the loop of his *reata*. He brought the horse close, and Mandy Lee cast off the rope, mounted her horse and rode away while Ike was loping swiftly near.

"Well, you doggoned lucky devil, what did the lady say?" said Ike as he came up and stopped beside Lanky Bob.

"She said 'Oh!' when I picked her up, and 'Thank you' when I brought her horse to her," answered Bob.

"Well, what did you say, you danged clam?"

"Nothing."

"Nawthin'? Why, what in blazes ailed yer tongue? I bet I'd of said a heap if I'd had Mandy Lee Travis in the crook o' my elber."

"Oh, I don't know! The last time the lady spoke to me she told me never to speak to her again. I respect the lady's desires."

Missouri Ike stared, and his lower jaw drooped. Astonishment had him in its grip. He had never known a man like this before.

"Say, haint ye got sense? Don't ye know a gal says them things when she's jest achin' to be licked into listenin' to some more talk? My Lawd, Bob, you must of been raised where they aint no gals!"

Bob made no reply, but rode on quietly, thinking of the thrill that had run through his body when he picked Mandy Lee from the rocky floor of Ash Creek after she had jumped clear from her falling horse. He thought of the joy that had surged through him as his sorrel went racing down the winding cañon after the fear-crazed chestnut. The sorrel had done exceedingly well to carry his double load out to the level and safety, with that threatening torrent at his heels.

It was only a few days after the race with the cattle in Ash Creek Cañon that a sleek stranger came to the Double T. He was persuasive and oily in manner, with an unctuous smile. Mandy Lee disliked him at once, but Sa' Jane admired him. She swallowed his flattery whole and entertained him handsomely. She soon wheedled Tom into giving the stranger an hour of his time while he explained his object.

There were many words and the showing of many pictures, much talk of prospective riches and the handing out of many printed sheets. The stranger gave the name of James Harding, and he claimed to be an oil operator from Texas. He cleverly learned the names of relatives Sa' Jane was proud of in the Lone Star State, and at once claimed intimacy with several.

He spoke glibly of men who had made fortunes in oil, calling them by their first names in many instances, thus creating an impression that he was on the most friendly terms with them, and within a week he had Tom and Sa' Jane using stubby pen-

cils and figuring feverishly to see how much they would be worth in five years if they invested in accordance with his advice. In ten days old Tom jogged over to the train and took passage for El Paso. When he returned, he had mortgaged his entire holdings to an El Paso bank for fifteen thousand dollars.

Tom placed the full amount, in packages of one thousand each, in a stack on his table; and Harding, his hawk eyes glittering, began to stack handsomely engraved stock-certificates.

"You-all air mighty sure, aint ye, that this is a safe bet?" queried Tom rather anxiously. "It puts the ol' woman an' me in a danged deep hole if anythin' slips. I want to be sure."

"You are just as safe and sure as—why, look here, now—" And he went off into another glib recital of how fortunes had been made in the Texas oil-fields. Then, when he thought he had them, he pushed the stack of bills toward Tom with both hands.

"I'm givin' it to you straight, but if you aint willin' to trust me, just take them bills back again an' call it off."

"No. We aint a-goin' to do any such foolishness," said Sa' Jane. "We're in this thing to make a spoon er spile a horn."

With apparent reluctance and many words, Harding picked up the cash and stowed it in a little leather bag under his coat.

"Now you're perfectly satisfied, are you? Because if you aint, I'll hand it all back to you." And he made a half-hearted motion toward the bag. "I want my customers to trust me."

"It's all right," said Tom, waving a hand. "The bet goes as it lays. Win er lose, we stacks our money on this cyard."

HARDING left within the half-hour and headed directly for Gibson of the Y Bar Y. He had talked with Gibson several times before on the same subject. Now he sprung the investment of Travis as another argument. Gibson wavered, seemed on the point of duplicating the investment of Travis, and Harding flashed another brilliant array of figures. Nat Gibson had just started to speak, when Lanky Bob called to him. Gibson and Harding were just outside the horse-corral, and Bob was inside, working over Gibson's favorite horse.

"Wait a minute," said Gibson. "I gotta see what ails that hoss."

He entered the corral, where Bob squatted on his heels examining a shin. He squatted beside of Bob. Both their faces were turned so Harding could not see their lips or eyes.

"Gib, when you trade horses, do you insist on seeing the other man's horse, or do you trade unseen?" asked Bob in a low tone.

"Eh?" said Gibson, bending closer to the leg, as though to examine an injury. "I see, of course."

"Well, why not see now? I'm afraid this man's trading-stock has ringbone or glanders."

"All right, Bob," said Gibson, straightening up. "That aint bad. I'll keep watch of it, an' it wont amount to nothin'."

Bob seemed perfectly satisfied and went on doctoring a scratch on the shoulder above that shin. Gibson came outside.

"That looks danged good, Harding, but I don't guess I'll bet on it this time," he said. "Reckon I'll jest take a li'l'e pasear down Texas way an' see them wells a-spoutin' afore I bet."

"Better write a little check now. It's going up on the first, sure as death and taxes. Put a white chip on it—say, five thousand."

"Naw! Not today. If it raises, let 'er raise."

NAT GIBSON climbed the eastbound train the following day, and a hard-eyed seller of wildcat stock watched him go from the door of Pete Cummins' saloon. Two hours later the westbound overland took this philanthropic personage aboard, bag and baggage, with the accent on the bag. This reposed under his left arm, beneath his coat, and a healthy automatic of large caliber rested in his right-hand pocket.

Four days later Gibson returned, and Bob met the train, leading a saddle-horse. Gibson came out and held out a hand to Bob.

"Shake, cowboy!" he said with a grin. "I reckon you saved me a heap o' money. They aint no sech company as the Mesquite Oil Company. That thar Harding aint nothin' but a shark. He's wanted fer swindlin' in Houston an' Dallas an' San Antone. Lord knows how many other places would like to get their hooks on 'im."

Bob thought with a twinge of pain what it meant to Mandy Lee that old Tom had

thrown his money away. That ill-advised action might cost Tom Travis his ranch. While the place was worth more than double the amount he had borrowed, yet at a forced sale he could never expect to realize anywhere near its full value.

"Do me a favor, Gib," he said. "Keep this under your hat. Travis would wilt if he knew he had lost all he put in. There may be some way of helping him out, and I don't want him to worry too much."

"All right, Bob. What you say goes," said Gibson with a twinkle. "Mandy Lee is a damn fine gal an' aint no ways responsible fer that ol' she bobcat Tom wished on her fer a maw. I'll shet up like a safe with a time-lock onto it. Anythin' else?"

"Yes. Give me a month off," said Bob. "Keerect! Take it an' welcome, an' here's a coupla twenties to go with it fer good luck. Sort of a thank-offerin'."

BOB left the ranch next morning and did not show up again till his month was fully gone. He said nothing to anyone about where he had been or what he had done while away. The cowboys respected his silence and asked no questions.

Soon after his return Bob began to receive letters almost daily. They came from various points, some in California, others in Oklahoma. None came from Texas, but three had a Wyoming postmark on them.

Twice Bob sent a telegram, once to Bakersfield, California, once to the Wyoming address. He wrote a number of letters and sent them off plastered with stamps for special delivery.

In the meantime Tom Travis had begun an investigation, all too late. His letters had been returned to him with "Party unknown here" stamped under the name of the Mesquite Oil Company of Texas. Investigation proved that no such company existed, and that Harding was a notorious swindler, wanted by many sheriffs.

Mandy Lee noted the misery in his old eyes and wormed the truth out of him. She took his bent shoulders in her strong young arms and told him to buck up. Tom lifted a haggard face and looked at her.

"Mandy Lee," he said with a break in his voice, "ever since you was born, I've been workin' fer the time when I could say honestly that I didn't owe a dollar to any livin' man. I wanted to leave ye a lot o' good critters an' a good range, free an'

clear. I almost done it, but now I'm in the mire, plumb bogged down."

Mandy Lee looked at the wrinkled face and troubled eyes of the old man. Then she kissed him, telling him to not worry about her.

"Dad, I'm the healthiest, huskiest girl you ever saw. I can make money, plenty of it. Don't let any thought about me bother you for one second. The mortgage wont be foreclosed for some time, and we may pull out yet. Keep a stiff upper lip, Dad."

That afternoon Mandy Lee heard Sa' Jane boasting to a neighbor that before long she and Tom would be fixed right, that they would be beyond the need of working and could take their ease. When the old woman caller had gone, Mandy Lee opened up on her.

"Remember how daffy you were over that man Harding? Well, he has turned out a rascal. Skinned Dad out of more than he can ever pay. His oil company is all a fake. He is wanted for swindling in a good many counties in several States. Your wonderful investment is a bad one. I don't want to hear you mention it again.

"And don't you light into Dad about it, either. You were just as crazy about buying that stock as he was, and more so. You let him alone. Harding got you roped first, and then you lit in and helped him rope Dad. Don't forget that."

THIS kept Sa' Jane off Tom's back, but it did not aid in filling his pockets. The old man grew more bent and hollow-cheeked. His eyes no longer glowed with energy and life. They dulled, and the lines in his face deepened. He was very near a physical collapse.

"Why didn't Lanky Bob warn yer paw, like he did Nat Gibson? Why didn't he?" Sa' Jane would wail to Mandy Lee. "He done saved Gibson an' let yer paw go ruint. He's a snake; that's what he is!"

Mandy Lee always left her mother when the old lady began this cry. She felt too many twinges of jealousy over Bob's proximity to Mary Gibson to defend him, but she disliked to hear him abused.

Once she went to her father with an offer of help on the range.

"Dad, I can ride better than half your men, and rope as well as some. Let me make a hand. It will save you some money and wont hurt me."

"I dunno, Mandy Lee. It don't seem

noways right fer my gal to be ridin' range. You meet up with a lot o' mighty unpleasant things at that. I don't like it none, Mandy Lee. An' some of the men is mighty rough that works fer our neighbors these times."

Mandy Lee's eyes snapped, and her hand slipped naturally to where her thirty-eight always hung when she rode.

"I'm not afraid of your rough *hombres*," she said, lifting her head proudly. "As for the unpleasant things, I'll endure them."

Mandy Lee carried her point and began to ride range daily. Sa' Jane objected, to no purpose. Then she took a new whack at Bob.

"Goin' to start out workin' fer the dry law? Better! Mebbe Bob could stay sober if they'd enforce the law ag'in' sellin' liquor."

"Mary Gibson told me yesterday that Bob hadn't had the smell of whisky on him since the day he—he was in the ash-barrel."

"Git out! Are you takin' anythin' that skim-milk gal says as truth? I bet he's makin' love to Mary right along. Most likely that's why he warned Nat an' didn't say nothin' to yer paw. All he wants is to see they's plenty o' fuzzy on the feathers where he makes his bed. He wants some fool cow-girl to marry him so he gits a soft, warm nest an' a purrin', cuddlin' bunny to wait on 'im."

Sa' Jane looked over her spectacles at Mandy Lee and laughed.

"You-all air simple. Tuk everythin' he said as gospel truth. Now he's stuck on yeller hair and skim-milk eyes, and here you be, tryin' to defend 'im to yer maw. He knowed he'd queered hisself with us when he got dumped in Pete Cummins' ash-bar'l, an' so he done laid out to git Mary, thinkin' that'd give 'im the Y Bar Y later.

"Caint ye see through a ladder? It's as plain as my nose. He wants to git an' git big, I tell ye; an' he figgers Gibson makes the best chance. That's why he lit right out fer the Y Bar Y when he got let out yere. He's jest a plain, good-fer-nothin' tramp confidence man an' a light-o'-love fiddlin' round Mary Gibson."

Mandy Lee fled. Out into the night she ran, blindly, jealousy of Mary Gibson and Bob filling her brain with bitter thoughts and her heart with pain. She ran down the beaten path that led to the big ledge

where Bob had sat long ago with Spoutin' Jim. She flung her body down across a bulging rock and sobbed. A voice spoke to her out of the darkness, and the peculiar odor of Chinese tobacco floated to her nostrils. She answered without lifting her head.

"Man'y Lee, you no cly. Heap mo bet-tah you laugh," said the voice.

"Oh, Quong, I'm so unhappy I can't help crying," she said mournfully.

"Whuffaw? Heap fine night. Bime-by come Bob, sit on lock, watchum you window. He no likee he see you cly."

"What do you mean about Bob coming to watch my window?"

"Him heap come, thlee—fo' time evly week me see him. Allee time he come. Mebbeso he come now." Mandy Lee rose up comforted.

It could not be possible that Bob was making love to Mary Gibson, reasoned Mandy Lee, after Quong See had talked to her, and spending his evenings in staring at her own window, hoping for a sight of her. She went to her room in a happier frame of mind, and her sleep that night was much less troubled than it had been lately.

CHAPTER VIII

THE time of the fall round-up was near. Tom had cut his force down to half its old number. He was working himself and Mandy Lee to the limit in trying to make good the lack of men.

Four days after Mandy Lee had sought refuge on the rock ledge, to be comforted by old Quong, Tom sent the old cook out with the wagon with orders to make camp in a round valley between the arms of two big hills. The little valley was not far from the Lazy K at the west. A section of the Y Bar Y came near it on the north.

That morning Mandy Lee undertook to ride a certain big draw and haze out any cattle she found there. They had to be driven down to the lower levels close to the international line, then turned west past the shoulder of an immense hill, hazed across a deep, wide arroyo and taken past a bit of very rough ground beyond, before turning up towards the holding-ground.

She came out to the arroyo and crossed it with a score of cows, some half-grown calves and a few fat steers in the band she

drove. Where she made her way over the stretch of rough ground, she could not be over three hundred yards from the line, with its wire fence. As she rode up out of the arroyo behind the cattle, she looked back along the line and saw a band of mounted men ride out from between two small hills on the southern side of the line.

Thinking them merely a patrol of federal soldiers, she did not hurry the cattle. A second glance showed her two men dismounted and cutting the fence-wire. At once she lifted her rawhide *reata*, slung it into a long loop and began using it as a whip.

The cows ran lumberingly, as cows always do, stopping short at each twenty yards to make sure that their calves were coming. Carefully Mandy Lee edged the band away from the line as the ground cleared. Then she heard the sound of firing, and bullets hummed and screamed and whined past her. Another backward glance showed her a band of five or six mounted men racing to cross the arroyo.

The main part of the band was hurling lead across the line till the air seemed full of screeching furies. Suddenly Mandy Lee felt her horse stumble and heard him groan.

"Keep a-going, bronc! Don't you stumble again!" she cried to him. "Hi-yi-yippi-i-yay! Run, you mavericks!"—as she flicked a couple of calves with her *reata*. "Oh, Lordy!"

WITH her last word, her horse seemed to give at the knees without any warning as he landed in his gallop. Down to one shoulder and over on his side he flopped, with a heavy grunt of expelled breath. Mandy Lee struck the sand with a shock, and the body of her horse pinned her left leg immovably. Shaking her head to clear it, she propped herself up on an elbow and struggled.

One hard pull on the pinioned leg, with her right heel set against the saddle, and she gave it up. Her hand went to her holster, and she drew the businesslike thirty-eight with the long barrel.

She lay back on the sand to rest her arm, then drew herself around to where she could reach to drop her hand on the shoulder of the dead horse. She drew the hammer back and waited.

"When the leading man passes that cactus clump, I'll give it to him," she resolved. "I'll pull for his belt. If I over-

shoot, I'll get him around the breast or head. If I undershoot, I'll drop his *caballo*. Gee! I wish Dad would come with a bunch. I wish—I wish Bob—”

UP on the ridge that marked the Y Bar Y southern boundary, Bob had been riding. The rattle of rifle-fire had caught his attention. He looked and had seen the slow-running cows and the horse and rider following. A second look showed him that it was not a puncher, as he had supposed at first glance. A moment more, and he knew Mandy Lee.

None but an absolutely reckless rider would ever have ridden down the steep slope that Lanky Bob now charged. An ordinarily reckless horseman who might have attempted it would have contented himself with taking a slow gait. Bob squirmed his horse hown it at a speed a fairly good rider would call fast on a level.

As he rode through the brush, jumping over rocks and sliding down abrupt pitches, another pair of eyes saw him, looked along the way he was heading and beheld the drama being staged near the line. With a wild yell old Tom Travis waved an arm to his only observer within sight and started in the same direction. Splintershin Jake looked, saw and slammed the rowels home.

“Mandy Lee, an’ them devils shootin’ her up! Oh, my Gawd!” he yelled, and raced after Tom, caught and passed him, taking chances at every jump.

The bandit leader was nearing the cactus-clump, and Mandy Lee had drawn down on him with a steady hand. Her finger had taken up the crawl in the trigger, and half an ounce more of pressure would make her gun speak. Came the rush of hoofs, a sliding stop and the landing of a heavy body beside her. Her finger closed convulsively, and the roar of a forty-five-seventy smothered the crack of her thirty-eight. The leader pitched head first over the shoulder of his horse.

Mandy Lee had taken a chance at eighty yards, and her left hand held a number of shells, ready for reloading swiftly. Now she fired at the oncoming rustlers coolly, trying to make her shots count. The gun at her elbow belched twice more, and the attackers split, wheeled aside in two directions and turned back. Past the dead horse charged one of the heavy horses from the chuck-team, a blind bridle on his head and old Quong on his bare back, swinging a huge “hogleg” in either hand

and howling a wonderful chant of blasphemy.

The man beside Mandy Lee leaped to his feet, made two strides and vaulted to the saddle of a pinto horse that had stood waiting for him. With her first view of her defender, Mandy Lee gasped. It was Bob.

Down from the Lazy K came a wildly racing mob of punchers, shooting as they raced. In from the other side rollicked Splintershin Jake with Tom Travis about three jumps in his rear and damning everything in sight as he flogged more speed out of his bay gelding.

Two of the raiders died in crossing the arroyo. Another fell from his mount with his legs in the United States and his head and shoulders in Mexico. Quong jumped his heavy plug through the gap in the wire just behind the heels of Pinto. Splintershin led the Lazy K outfit by a head, and Tom turned aside to reach Mandy Lee.

Tom dug sand with his hands and then heaved upon the horn of the saddle, without releasing his girl. Then he dropped the loop of his rope on that horn, mounted and took a dally round his own saddlehorn. Starting his horse slowly and making him get down to his work, he raised the carcass until Mandy Lee drew her leg free.

“Hurt much, honey girl?” he asked anxiously.

“No, Dad, not much. Mostly it’s numb. I’ll be all right in a jiffy.”

She sat down on the body of her horse and waited for returning circulation to bring life and freedom of movement. Presently Tom reported the returning punchers in sight, led by Lanky Bob on Pinto. At the tail end of the procession came Quong, leading two saddled horses. The men from the Lazy K paused to glean weapons from the body at the fence, the two in the arroyo, the one Mandy Lee had pulled down on, and one other. Other weapons hung from the saddlehorns of the two led horses. The procession came near to Mandy Lee, and Bob veered off towards the Y Bar Y.

“Say, that thar rustler jest this side the cactus-clump had two holes in ‘im,” said one. “A danged big hole just over the heart an’ a littler one right sprang in the forks of his breastbone. T’other chap over here at the side had one big one straight through just below the ribs, from the right side to the left. I see Lanky Bob is packin’

a forty-five-seventy, so I reckon he plugged 'em both, but who'n blazes slung the li'l chunk? Good gosh, Mandy Lee! You're packin' a thirty-eight!"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Nothin', only I reckon I kin see through a ladder. A danged good shot, Mandy Lee. Dogged if it haint!"

Quong had led his captured horses up to Mandy Lee, and now he gave her the choice of the two.

"You takee hawss, Man'y Lee. Blown hawss, black hawss. Allee samee. Which one?"

"I'll take the brown," said she. "Dad, will you change saddles?"

Several of the punctioners swung to the ground, freed her saddle from the dead horse and exchanged it for the one on the brown. The Mexican saddle was cinched on the horse Quong had ridden.

"Tbank you, Quong. You're a good old scout," said Mandy Lee, and Quong beamed delightedly.

"We done well today," the leader of the Lazy K outfit said to Tom. "Takin' them Bob an' Mandy got, an' them we stopped over the line, we reduced that gang by seven. That'll help some."

The Lazy K boys rode homewards, and Mandy Lee rode slowly off with her father, Quong and Jake following.

"Mandy Lee, you-all git right along back to yer maw. This aint no place fer a gal, nohow," said Tom. "I'll git along somehow. The boys from the Lazy K will help me now an' ag'in. A round-up haint no place fer a gal, an' when them hellions from over the line is gittin' brash, it makes it wuss. Better go, honey."

"No, Paw, I wont do it. I'll stick and help out yet awhile. When we got the cattle gathered in will be time enough for me to go. I don't care to stay after that, anyhow."

"What fer did Bob shy off thataway, instead of comin' along with the bunch?" asked Tom, dropping the subject of her going home.

"I reckon I'm the reason, Dad," answered Mandy Lee sadly. "When he was leaving the Double T, I struck his hand with my quirt and told him never to speak to me again as long as he lived. I wouldn't shake hands with him even. He hasn't spoken to me since."

"Didn't he say anythin' when he lugged ye out'n Ash Creek ahead o' them stam-pedin' cattle?" demanded Tom.

"Not a word then, or today. He's taken me at my word."

"Of all the gosh-blamed idiots, you'n Bob beat the world! Actin' like kids! Huh! I wish he'd shuck ye till yer teeth rattled, when ye hit 'im, ye ornery li'l cat. Here he comes larrupin' down here to keep them scum off'm ye, an' you let 'im go without a word. Gosh!"

Mandy Lee submitted meekly to Tom's castigation. It felt rather good to her, after hearing her mother handle the other side with so much venom. Lanky Bob had almost reinstated himself with her, but a jealous thought of Mary Gibson stiffened her antagonism. Her knees weakened as her temper stiffened.

"I believe I will go home, Dad. My knees are shaking, and I feel weak all over," she told him. "I'll be out again in the morning. That tumble wasn't as easy as it looked."

"All right, Mandy Lee. Take it easy, 'honey girl!'"

CHAPTER IX

MANDY LEE felt a little stiff and sore from her fall for a few days, but she made light of her lameness. Much harder to bear was her thought of Bob being flattered and ogled by yellow-haired Mary. She hated to admit it, even to herself, but her jealousy would not down.

Over at the Y Bar Y, Bob was not listening to any siren song by Mary Gibson. He was harkening to hardened old cowboys like Cady and Missouri Ike and Slim Hupner and Hellfire Mike Corrigan, who were guying him unmercifully about running away before he had been thanked for his heroic defense of Mandy Lee. But Bob had learned a great deal since coming to the cattle country. Among other things he had learned to look deeper than the surface for any man's actuating motive. He could take things now that formerly angered him, without turning a hair.

Seeing him take all their rough jokes smilingly took the pepper out of the jokes, and the men dropped all reference to the raid and the routine work went on exactly as though no raid had been attempted. The line fence was solidly repaired where it had been cut.

Bob was getting more letters than ever, and showing some little excitement while

reading them. As a matter of course he was made a target for witticisms every time a letter came to him. But after laughing off their jokes regarding the last mail received, he settled down and wrote two brief letters. One contained but one sentence, the other two.

The following morning Bob had a talk with Gibson. They stood near the house, and the conversation lasted but a moment. Then Bob whirled and walked swiftly to the bunk-house. Here he threw a few articles into a suitcase, changed into other clothing and took his revolver from a nail where it hung.

He spun the cylinder, dropped a tiny bit of oil in the lock and cylinder-bearings, wiped and oiled the bore. Then he set the gun in its holster and stowed it in the case. Adding a handful of shells, he snapped the lock, put on his hat and came out.

"Cady, ride along of Bob an' bring Pinto back with ye," shouted Gibson. "So long, Bob. Take care of yerself."

This time Bob was only absent from the Y Bar Y for two weeks, and he came back happy. A letter had informed Gib when to expect him, and the old man met him at Atascosa with the buckboard.

"Everything lovely, Bob?" he said as they shook hands.

"You bet!" Bob replied, grinning. "Better'n I expected."

Gibson knew nothing of Bob's purpose in leaving the Y Bar Y for either trip he had made, but took it for granted that something important had called him away. Now he was perfectly satisfied to let the answer he had received close the conversation.

The bunch at the bunk-house greeted Bob hilariously. They gave him backslappings that would have crippled a small man unused to it. They shook hands violently, shouted witticisms over each other's heads, even went so far as to start a rough-house, pretending they wanted to open his suitcase to "see what Pop lugged home fer the kids."

OVER at the Double T, things were getting worse every day. Tom had acquired a permanent wrinkle between his eyes that never showed there before. His temper had grown irascible, and he fought with Sa' Jane harder than ever.

For ten days after the raid, Mandy Lee had hoped to see Bob and say something kind. Then, by roundabout means, she

learned that he had gone away for two weeks. She saw him riding with Nat Gibson on his return, and waited under a peach tree in the Travis orchard, hoping he would look her way. He failed to cast a glance in that direction, and she turned away provoked.

In some way the old jealousy awakened from the sleep into which Quong's words had lulled it. Mandy Lee went about the ranch and house, growing more miserable with every day. One afternoon, when she was at the corral with Tom, he mentioned Bob and she flared.

"Don't you speak his name to me again!" she stormed. "I hate him!"

Then she burst out crying and raced for her room. Tom stared.

"My Lord! What ails the gal? That aint like my Mandy Lee," he said, and followed her slowly to the house. Sa' Jane was just coming in from the opposite side and she fixed him with a hard eye.

"Tom Travis, that gal aint well. We gotta let her go away somewheres."

"Good gosh, ol' woman! How'm I goin' to git the cash to buy her ticket? It takes all I can scrape to keep the ranch agoin'."

"Sell some steers. You got a plenty."

"Uh-huh, an' land in the pen at Florence. You know as well as I do that them steers is all mortgaged. If I sell 'em, the money has to go the bank. I'm all bogged down, Sa' Jane, an' the buzzards is sittin' around, waitin' to pick my bones. They aint more'n a kick er two left in me, an' then they begins. I'm plumb used up."

"If that there contemptible Bob critter had warned ye like he did Nat Gibson—" wailed Sa' Jane.

"You hush! We done kicked Bob out long afore Harding ever showed up around here. How in torment could he warn us when he never knowed we was aimin' to play the fool until Harding come to the Y Bar Y? You make me mad, Sa' Jane, with yer eternal yelpin' ag'in' Bob."

Late that day Cady, of the Y Bar Y, rode past on his way home. He had mail for the Double T and Lazy K, as well as the home ranch. He hailed old Tom from his saddle and waved a sheaf of mail.

"Come an' git it, ol'-timer!" he yipped.

"Haint nothin' worth while in the bunch, most likely," said Tom, taking the packet tied with twine string. "Mostly trouble in my mail."

"Buck up, ol' man! You aint busted yit," said Cady.

"No, but God knows I'm dum near it," answered Tom drearily.

He carried the mail into the house and began to open it with his jackknife. Three or four advertising circulars he threw on the floor in disgust. Then he tackled a thin envelope with an El Paso postmark on it. From this he drew a narrow sheet, folded once, and opened it. A sigh, and the rubbing of his head followed.

"That danged int'russ an' the first installment on the principal comes due in six days, Sa' Jane," he said. "I'm gittin' so I can't see mail comin' in without gittin' weak an' shaky. Gosh! I wish that there feller Harding had tuck a apple-plexy afore he got here."

"Can ye pay?" demanded Sa' Jane.

"I got it all but two-seventeen. I'll have to borrow that."

"Who from?"

"I dunno. Reckon I'll ride over an' see Nat about it tonight."

He rode over to Gibson's and told him his predicament without reserve. He laid his cards on the table, face up.

"Now ye know just what a dang fool I've been, Nat. Looks like I'm li'ble to git foreclosed. Knowin' all that, are ye willin' to lend me two-seventeen to make up this yere payment?"

"You bet yer neck I am, an' if ye can't never pay it back, don't never worry none over it, Tom. You'n me've been good friends a long while, an' two-seventeen aint agoin' to part us."

From a long pocketbook Nat lifted a century note, two fifties and a couple of tens. He laid the lot on Tom's arm.

"There ye are. Dang the chicken-feed. I haint got the small change with me. Sure that'll fix ye up right?"

"Yep. That'll do fer now, though God knows what I'll do next time. The future looks dum smoky to me. Can't see no way out."

"Buck up, ol' man. They aint nothin' so bad but it might be wuss. Maybe things will take a turn fer the better afore long."

But Tom shook his head as he tucked the bills in a pocket.

"I'm afeered not, Nat. I'm gittin' old, an' the bog is deep, wide an' dang sticky. I can't lift a hoof no more."

Tom was just mounting when Bob came along and hailed him. The lank hobo had filled out and shaped up until there was not a better looking man in four

counties. He rode with a sure grace incomparable. His clear eyes showed no trace of the old alcoholic blur.

"Hello, Tom! How are tricks? Everything coming on good?" he said.

"Bum! I'm totterin' on my last legs, Bob. May keep my nose above water fer another year, an' then I'll sink. Hellfire an' bobcats! I'd give—I'd give half the life that's left to me to git my hooks on that there crook Harding, right now. I'd make him dum hard to catch. I'd bore fer ile in his gizzard, jest as sure as I haint ferget how to throw a gun. Well, I gotta be travelin'. So long, Bob."

"So long, Tom; and don't be discouraged. Something may happen yet."

"Uh-huh! Vulture Peak may turn over bottom up an' bring up gold. The Hassayamp may turn around an' run uphill next winter. I'm not lookin' fer miracles, Bob. I'm jest honin' fer rest from debts."

The old man touched his horse with a spur and jogged off, while Bob looked after the bent old figure with pity.

TOM mailed the money to the bank and took up his burden once more. There would be a three months' respite now, and then interest to pay. Another installment on the principal, plus interest, in six months. He wondered where the money would come from.

"I'll just have to make the best bargain I can, an' let the ol' place go at auction, I reckon. The bank can force a sale any time I don't come in with my ante," he told Mandy Lee.

Sorrow and worry and labor! A general breaking-down of every defense, sleepless nights, troubled days, nightmare apprehension. Tom felt his mind almost giving way under the strain. He grew moody, scarcely speaking unless Sa' Jane roused his temper.

Then came another mail, brought this time by Splintershin Jake. There were two letters for Mandy Lee, one for Sa' Jane and a long, heavy envelope addressed to Tom. The old man took the packet and tore his own letter open. Several papers slid into his hands, and he stared at them unbelievably.

"Mandy Lee! Oh, Mandy Lee!" he gasped, groping for something to grasp. The other letters fell to the ground. His own papers rattled in his trembling fingers. He took two staggering steps and fell, just as Mandy Lee came down from the porch with a rush.

CHAPTER X

MANDY LEE managed to get her hands under that gray head and save it from striking the bottom step. Her clear young voice summoned her mother and old Quong imperatively.

They lifted Tom and carried him up the steps and in at the door. Just inside he spoke to Mandy Lee.

"Gimme a chair an' git them papers, Mandy Lee. Quick, afore they blow away er somethin' happens to 'em. I'm all right. Just a faint."

They placed him in a chair, bolstered his shrunken form with a number of cushions, and Mandy Lee ran out after the dropped mail. She came back, her face flaming with excitement.

"Dad, what does it mean. 'Satisfaction of Mortgage.' Who paid it off? Look, Mother! That old mortgage that has been worrying Dad to death is paid. Paid, do you hear? And here is his check for the last interest and installment on principal. They have even returned that. And not a word except to say the mortgage was paid the day your money got there, so they are sending a cashier's check back."

"Haint there nothin' there to show who done it? Not a word?"

"No, Dad. Not a thing," said Mandy Lee.

"Mebbe Harding aint such a thief, after all," hazarded Sa' Jane. "Mebbe he did it. Ye know he said he'd give his personal guarantee that them stiffkits was all right."

"Faugh!" said Tom, sitting up, the light of battle in each eye. "When I see the devil buildin' orphan asylums an' straightenin' deformed legs, I'll begin to believe Harding aint a crook. Not afore. If Harding paid this mortgage, he done it because somebody stood by with a gun an' give 'im orders."

"Well, who else could 'a' done it if he didn't?"

"I dunno, Sa' Jane," replied Tom. "They aint no man owes me nothin' that aig, 'cept the skunk that buncoed me out of it. I'd sooner expect to see the White Lank Mountains goin' out fer a walk, than o see him handin' back anythin' he got holt of. Mebbe I'll find out some day. I hope so, fer I'd like to shake hands with he man that done it."

It seemed as though Tom's wish would not be gratified. Days ran past and he was no nearer solving the riddle than at first.

Then there came another mail, and in the bundle lay a paper from Salt Lake City. Tom stared at its pages, wondering how it happened to come to him. He picked up the wrapper and studied the writing on it. It revealed nothing, and he dropped it again.

"Who in blazes is sendin' me a paper from Salt Lake?" he queried. "I dunno why anybody should. I haint a Mormon, an' I haint related to a Mormon. Here, Mandy Lee! See if you can find out why it come."

"Why, of course I can. A marked column on the third page. Why! Mercy on us! Listen, Dad! 'An end comes to all things and an end has come to the career of a certain tricky, smooth-tongued salesman of fake oil-stock. Yesterday, in Judge Hempel's court, this slippery individual of many aliases was remanded to jail pending the receipt of evidence from five States regarding his operations."

"It seems, according to the testimony of a certain detective, that this man has called himself Harding in Arizona, Purcell in Utah, Harrison in Wyoming, Hartinge in California, Williams in Oregon and Murdock in Nevada. How many other States have known him under other names does not yet appear. The detective, his accuser, promises the submission of more evidence and greater detail soon."

"The prisoner, who was arrested by a local officer at the request of his Nemesis, the detective, bore the marks of having received very recently a severe beating. He refused to lodge a charge against any person and exonerated the detective and arresting officer. When asked to give the name of the party who beat him up, he retorted that it was no one's business but his own. Judge Hempel then remanded him, to wait receipt of a warrant or warrants promised by wire."

"That-is all there is of it. I'm so glad, so absolutely tickled to think that fellow is caught, that I could scream! Dad, how do you suppose they knew we'd been bitten by him?"

"I reckon the detective has a list of suckers Harding snared. Dunno any other way. Bet he had a copy sent to ev'ry sucker on the string. But they haint nothin' in that yarn that explains who paid the bank what I owed. 'Taint likely Harding done it."

"Write to the bank and ask them," said Mandy Lee.

"All right. I'll jest do that same," said Tom. "You help."

So the two set to work and composed a letter, which Mandy Lee wrote and Tom signed. Four days later came an answer:

We beg to inform you that we received the remittance covering your indebtedness by express from Salt Lake City. We had received a wire, signed with your name, asking the exact amount due upon the fifteenth of the month. Our reply gave the desired information, and the money was in our hands at noon on the fourteenth.

Hoping that this explanation is satisfactory, we beg to remain

Yours truly,

— — —

"Mandy Lee, what date did that paper give fer the appearin' in court o' that there shark Harding?" asked Tom.

"The twelfth, Dad," answered Mandy Lee absent-mindedly. "There is another paper in this envelope, tucked in as though it was an afterthought. A scrap. Hm! Wait a minute."

Springing to her feet, she hurried out of the room. She was back within a minute, comparing this scrap with another. Her face turned from white to red and back to white. Her breath came fast.

"Dad! They're just alike. Oh, Dad!"

She was off, bareheaded, skirts flying, tucking the two bits of paper in her bosom as she ran. She mounted her horse, standing in front of the house ready for instant departure. The scattered grit from his flying feet pelted the wayside bushes as he bore her along. Tom stared, his under-jaw dropping low.

"I'll be danged!" he whispered as she went out of sight.

LANKY BOB was just dropping his loop on a calf. He was within a hundred yards of the public road. *Clippity-clop! Clippity-clop!* The sound of running hoofs came to him clearly. He stopped his throw a bit short by a jerk on the rope and listened. The calf ambled off to find its bawling mother. The rope trailed in the half-dried grass. Around the turn came Mandy Lee, her hair streaming.

Her eyes were quick, and nothing escaped them. She swung the rein across the neck of her mount and came plunging down between the little oaks to where Bob waited.

"Bob! Oh, Bob! Does your hand sting too much to let you talk to me for

a little while?" she asked him, her lip quivering.

"All Arizona can't stop me from talking to you if you want me to!" he exclaimed, swinging out of the saddle and reaching for her hand. "I have only been waiting until you were ready, Mandy Lee."

"Then tell me what this means," she said, twisting her hand out of his grasp and bringing out the two scraps of paper. "The same hand wrote both. One was pushed under my window-sash long ago. The other came in a letter from the El Paso Bank, and the cashier has written on it that it was received by them with certain money from Salt Lake City. What does it mean, Bob?"

"Before I do any explaining, Mandy Lee," said Bob sternly, but with a glad light in his eyes, "I expect you to explain how you happen to be keeping that first scrap all this time."

"I—oh—it just—I don't know, Bob."

HER chin had sunk on her breast, and her voice was barely audible to Bob. With a low laugh he took his wide hat off and threw it on the ground. He faced her now, as bare of head as she.

"Mandy Lee, I love you. I love you so much that I would go through hell to win you. I love you so much that I could stand aside and wish you all happiness if a better man had won you. I love you so much that I *have* gone through hell for you, the hell of fighting a thirst like the fires of hell.

"Mandy Lee, I licked John Barleycorn for you, just for you, dear. I licked him until he got down and crawled. I licked him until I can stand over a glassful of whisky, with its fumes in my nostrils, and not want to drink. Not want to, Mandy Lee. Did you get that?"

"I want you, Mandy Lee, and I have wanted you ever since that day at the loading chutes, when you watched me lick the two shacks. Oh, my dear, how I want you! Honey-girl, will you marry me some day, when I have more to offer you, when I can give my wife all she needs?"

"Oh Bob! I—I—I'm only a cow-girl, Bob dear, and a cow-girl doesn't want much when she l-l-likes the fellow."

Again Bob laughed happily as he threw one arm around her waist and lifted her out of the saddle. There he held her, her feet inches above the ground, and looked in her eyes. No tan ever colored a face as

richly as hers was colored now, but she met his look bravely.

"Mandy Lee, say after me: 'Bob, I love you and will marry you.'"

"Bob, I l-l-lo-love you and will marry you if you haven't got a cent."

"Now, Bob, you stop kissing me and explain those scraps of paper," she commanded ten minutes later. "Mercy me! I've lost them!"

"No matter. I'll explain. You see, that first time I went away, I tried to get track of Harding. When I failed, I hired the services of a detective from the Quinn Detective Agency.

"When I left the second time, it was in answer to information received from him that told me Harding was in Salt Lake City for a long stay. I found him before I met the detective and persuaded him to make restitution to your father. He hated to do it, but he consented after I had argued the matter with him."

"I know. That paper said he had been beaten up," said Mandy Lee.

"Well," said Bob, reddening, "he agreed and handed over the cash. I promised that nobody from here would appear against him if he did. That didn't matter, anyhow, as the detective has more than two hundred witnesses in this State alone, to give evidence against him.

"I sent the money to the bank and came home. The way the paper came to your dad was that the detective had a copy sent to every victim whose name and address he held. He told me he sent out over sixteen hundred copies to five States.

"One more thing, honey. A dear old aunt of mine had hired this same detective to shadow me when I started west. He knew just how I came here and what I was doing. He reported to her how I had been working and fighting my thirst, and how I had won. She died a week ago, and today I received a telegram telling me she had left me a share of her money. It isn't much, dear, but it will start me out with a third interest in the Y Bar Y."

"Bob! A third? That is more than two-thirds of all dad has."

They rode back to the Double T ranch, and old Quong See greeted the sight of Bob with a quavering yell. Tom and Sa' Jane came to the door to see what the row was about, and Tom took in the situation at a glance. He gripped Bob's hand and shook it nearly off.

"I jest tol' the ol' woman when Mandy Lee went tearin' down the road, that I was prayin' she'd git what she went after, an' that was a real man, name o' Bob. Sa' Jane, this yere is yer new son-in-law, an' I gives notice right now, ye gotta treat him right er I'll ship ye to Texas fer a forty-year vacation. Danged if I don't." . . .

"By the way, Tom," said Bob a little later, we caught Olanche Jack and two Mexicans right in the act of stealing calves. They owned up, too. You wont lose any more for a while, I guess. They ran them off by packing them in slings on a mule. Pastured them on Little Porphyry. I kept tab on Olanche Jack for six months before I got him right."

WHEN the Double T outfit came racking home at night, they found Lanky Bob sitting on the corral fence, whittling a stick. His grin was wide and welcoming. Yells of greeting cut the air as soon as the men recognized him, and they crowded their horses close to shake his hand. For a few minutes they created a Babel.

"Lordy, Bob, but it's good fer sore eyes to se ye home ag'in," said Splinterishin Jake. "The home place has looked danged empty lately."

"It's good to be back," he answered earnestly. "But listen, fellows. My name is Lanky Bob, henceforth and forever, to all punchers. But I have to wear my real name for business purposes so if you find any man hunting for Robert W. Scott, you'll know he means 'Lanky Bob.'"

"The next thing is that I am now a one-third owner in the Y Bar Y and am planning to build a house just over the line by the spring. Third and last, every danged old cow-punch in this outfit is hereby invited to attend my wedding tomorrow afternoon, at three o'clock. We will be married on the porch—gallery—veranda—anything you're minded to call it—of the Travis mansion.

"Quong See is especially invited and will tog out in his best Chinese costume to act as my best man. Now beg off if you dare, you yelping, yowling old bowlegs."

"Nary a beg!" shouted Bill. "We'll be there, you bet, to the last son-of-a-gun on the place. Wont we, fellers?"

The multiple howl from the bunch assured him that he was right. And the Y Bar Y outfit, led by Nat Gibson, was there with them at the appointed hour.

How "Modest Jim" Won the \$50 Prize

By WILLIAM LAWRENCE

Author of "The Awakening"

"YES—I remember why they call the Big Boss 'Modest Jim,'" said the Old Timer. "It started way back twenty years ago.

"I was in my third apprentice year when Jim Hadley came to work here—a quiet, bashful boy. His father had died and he was forced to leave grammar school and go to work.

"He was never among the groups of boys dodging the boss or watching the clock nor mixed up in anything that wasn't strictly business. And he never fooled away his time with the bunch after hours, so we left him pretty much to himself. We called him 'Modest Jim.'

"One day Old Man Adams, who owned this outfit in those days, came out into the shop and tacked up a sign over the foreman's desk.

"It seemed that the Old Man and his designer had run into a stone wall or what was Greek to most of us kids those days, and was offering a prize of fifty dollars to anyone who solved the problem. He must have been up against it or he never would have asked our bunch for help.

"About two weeks later, after the rest of us had forgotten all about it, the Old Man rushed out to Jim and fairly pushed five crisp ten dollar bills into his hand. He had solved the problem.

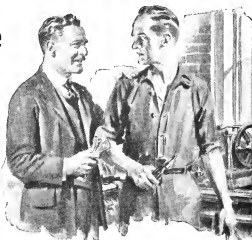
"When the foreman asked him how he did it, he replied, 'Oh, it wasn't anything great. Only a fresh brain on a stale subject.' That's all he ever said about it. But do you know what that boy had been doing? He'd been studying with the International Correspondence Schools in his spare time. No wonder he got ahead!

"And he went right up, and up and up, until today he is the Big Boss. And the rest of us are just about where we started. He's still 'Modest Jim,' but he's earning five times as much as I am.

"Take my advice, lad, and follow along in Jim's footsteps. Don't wait until it's too late to get the special training that is so essential to success."

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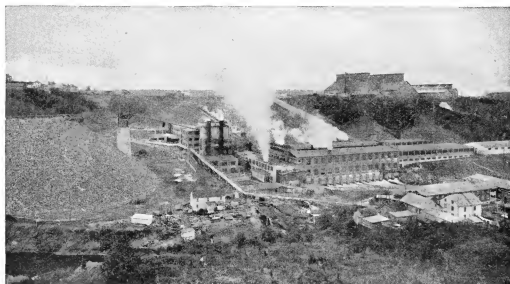
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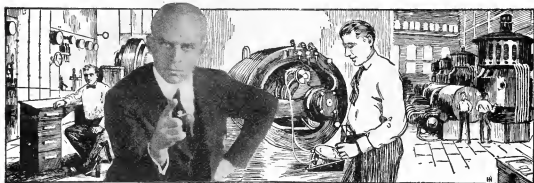
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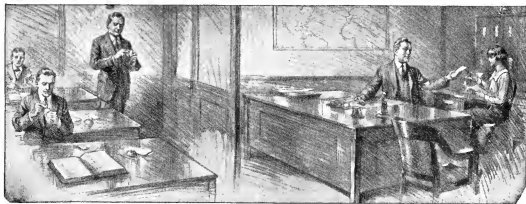
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 1 Platter, 13 1/2 inches

1 Platter, 11 1/2 inches
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